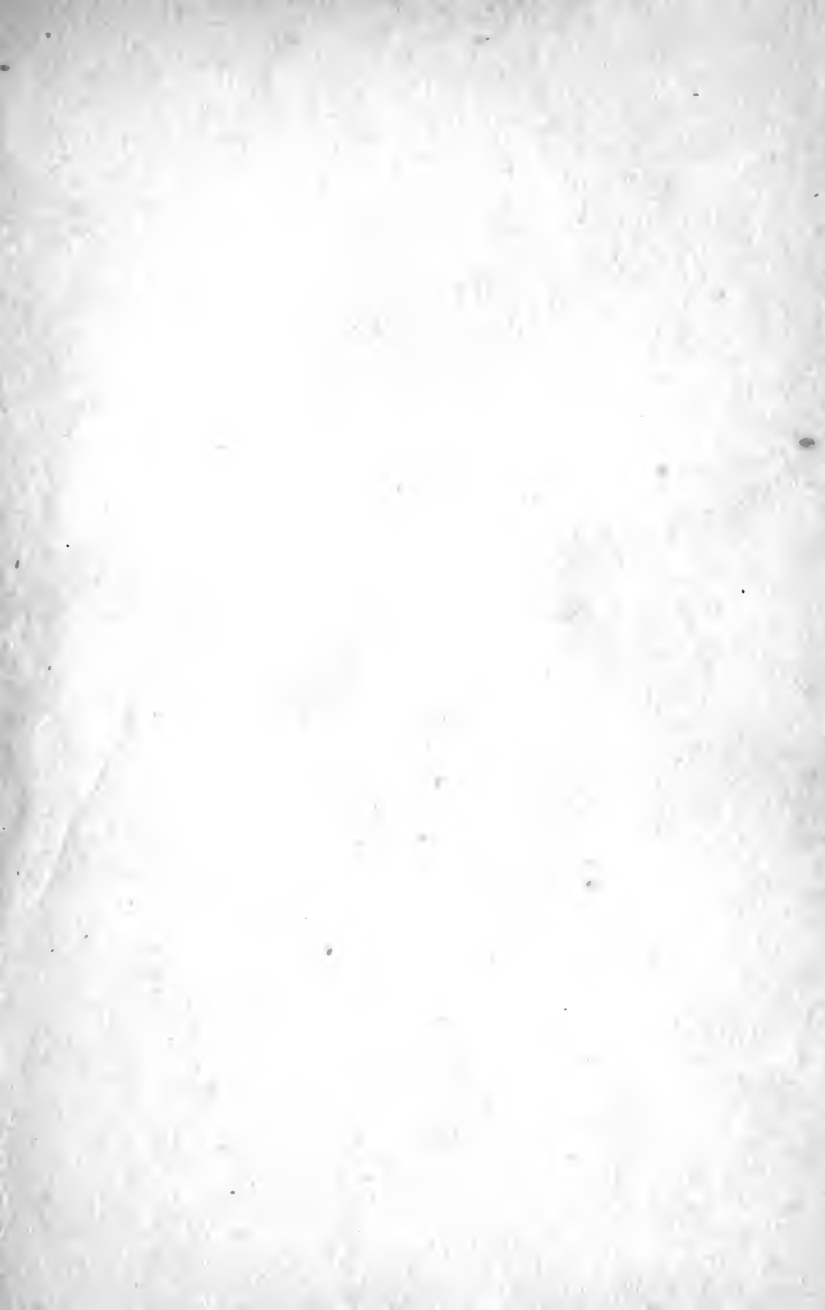


A TORTURED HEART



BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH



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A Tortured Heart

Being Part Second of
“The Trail of the Serpent”

By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of “Nearest and Dearest,” “Little Nea’s Engagement,”
“The Lost Lady of Lone,” “The Struggle of a Soul,”
“Em,” “Em’s Husband,” Etc.



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"A TORTURED HEART"

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A TORTURED HEART

CHAPTER I

"FOLLOW THIS MAN"

"Follow this man."

Lona Pond, the fair, fragile girl who lay back in a mesmeric trance, heard the words and her fingers trembled.

Old Nan Crook, the mesmerist, waited, with her eyes fixed upon the girl. It was her purpose to send the clairvoyant in quest of the mortal remains of the late Earl of Hawkewood and claim the reward promised for the discovery.

She had taken from her pocket a soft, black curl of the young earl's hair and pressed it to the forehead of the entranced girl.

"Follow this man," repeated old Nan, in a low, imperative tone.

"I do," breathed the girl.

"Do you see him?"

"Yes, I see him."

"Where is he?"

"Stop—I see only his face. There is something white before him which hides all but that. And that is dim and cloudy. I do not know it."

"Ah! Ah! He is laid out and covered over. Watch! Watch!" eagerly panted Old Nan.

"Don't! Don't! You hurt me!" cried the entranced girl, quick to catch the agitation of the other.

Old Nan controlled herself by a strong effort of will, and continued her experiments.

"Watch carefully—he is laid out on a table, and covered over with a sheet. Watch who comes."

"No," said Lona, slowly; "he is not lying down—he is sitting up, and something white before him; but all is vague."

Old Nan pressed the lock of hair upon the girl's white forehead and closed eyelids, muttering:

"Look steadily; see clearly."

"Yes; I know now. He is sitting in a barber's chair, with a large white towel before him. Now he rises, and the towel falls. And now I know him. He is Horace Hawke, Earl of Hawkewood. All fades away," said the girl in a fainting tone, as her chin dropped and her whole form relapsed.

"Humph!" muttered Old Nan. "In the barber's chair, in course. I might a-knowed as the lock of hair would a-tuk him just where it left him."

She let her victim rest for a few minutes and then made a few more passes over her head and shoulders, and, when the form was rigid again she said once more:

"Follow this man"

"I see him," breathed the entranced girl.

"Where is he?"

"Stop—it is confused. Oh, I see now. He is in a beautiful garden, or lawn, or park. There are a great multitude of people in their Sunday clothes; but I can't make any of them out. And there are tents, and tables, and musicians; but they are all mixed up. And now all is confusion again, and they are gone."

A few more vigorous passes, with the steady formula:

"Follow this man," and she resumed her revelations.

"I see him again, in a room full of gayly dressed ladies and gentlemen; but I cannot make any of them out. And now they are all gone," concluded the entranced girl, with a deep sigh.

"Follow this man."

"I do. I see him. He is in a half dark, handsome room, where the walls are full of books from floor to ceiling. There is another man with him. They seem to be talking together."

"What are they saying?"

"I cannot hear a word or sound. Yet they seem to be talking. And now the light goes out, and all is dark."

"Follow this man."

"I follow him. I find him in a handsome bedroom; rich crimson hangings fringed with gold are around the bedstead and before the windows."

"Is he alone?"

"No; there are two others with him."

"Who are those two others?"

"I don't know. I can't see them distinctly. I can never see any one distinctly except him—the earl."

"Ah! to be sure. You have only got a lock of the earl's catechism:

"What is the earl doing?"

"Nothing. The two other people are doing something to him."

"Eh!" exclaimed Nan, in a startling tone. "What are they doing to him? Are they killing him?"

"Don't! Oh, don't! You hurt me! No, they are not injuring him in any way, for the earl is sitting before his dressing table laughing, while they are standing each side of him, with their hands about his head, like they were bandaging or muffling it. And the earl is laughing all the time. I cannot hear him laughing, but I can see him."

"Look! look! See who the two other persons are and what they are doing," eagerly commanded Old Nan.

"I cannot. They are like dense, thick, black shadows of people. I can see they are men, by the shadows having pantaloons instead of gowns, and by their being so tall and big. Otherwise, I could not even see that much."

"Nor what they are doing to the earl?"

"No, no. And now the earl gets up and goes out. The shadows follow him to the door. The shorter of the two goes out with the earl. The other shadow remains in the room."

"One of the people goes out with the earl, you say? Does the earl leave his room?"

"Yes, he goes out, and the shorter of the shapes follows him. The room sinks into darkness. All is gone."

"Follow this man."

"I follow him. I see him on the railway. It is daylight. There are others with him. But I see their shapes

only vaguely. I do not know them. I see the earl plainly. I know him."

"Stop. You see the earl plainly. On a railway train? By daylight?" interrupted Old Nan, in bewilderment.

"Yes; he is roughly dressed, but I know him. And now he is gone, and the train is gone."

"Follow this man."

"I follow him. There is a great crowd of shipping. I see him on the deck of a great ship. There is great noise and confusion. I cannot hear the racket, but I see it. And I see the earl quite plainly. He is standing on the deck. He is gazing out at sea. His face is full of light and life."

"Is it the earl? Are you sure?"

"Yes, though he is dressed coarsely and has a long black beard."

"Then it is not the earl, for the earl has no beard, and could not have grown one in a few hours," said Old Nan, with a bewildered look.

"It is the earl, though he does not look like himself," persisted the entranced girl.

"How do you know it is the earl, if he does not look like himself?" inquired Old Nan.

"By something surer than sight or hearing," answered the girl.

"And what is that?"

"I cannot tell."

"Why can you not tell?"

"Because I do not know what it is. And now the ship has gone, and all is black again."

"Follow this man."

"I do follow him. I see him again. He has no long black beard now, but a stubble growth upon his chin, and he still wears common clothes."

"Where is he now?"

"I cannot see yet—out of doors somewhere—stay! Now I begin to see! It is in a hilly country. There are huts and tents, and holes like wells, with windlasses above them. And there are a great many rough-looking men; some at work in the windlasses; some washing something in pans on the bank of a stream of water; some are squatting on the ground; some are lying down at full length; a good

many are smoking pipes; but I cannot see any of them very distinctly; they are like moving shadows, all but the earl, whom I see very plainly."

"What is he doing?"

"Walking about smoking a pipe and talking to one or another of the men."

"Go on," said Old Nan.

"I cannot. Darkness has swallowed up the scene."

"Follow this man."

"I cannot. It is dark. I cannot see him," replied the entranced girl, whose face grew troubled in expression.

Old Nan made some heavy passes over the victim's head, neck and shoulders; and when the latter had become rigid again, she repeated her formula:

"Follow this man."

"I cannot! Oh, I cannot! It is so dark."

Old Nan took the lock of hair and pressed it on the forehead and on the closed eyes of the girl and reiterated her words:

"Follow this man."

"Oh, I cannot! It is all dark," repeated Lona, in a tone of distress.

"Hear and obey, then: Return to the chamber of the earl and tell me what you see there."

"I cannot go anywhere, I cannot see anything! I suffer! Oh, I suffer! I faint! I die!" breathed the tortured girl, in a voice that grew fainter with every syllable, and finally sank into silence.

Nor could all the efforts of Old Nan bring her to speak again.

"I hev overdid it this go, I'm afeared!" muttered the crone, as she began to reverse the passes over the girl's person.

After a while Lona Pond opened her eyes; but she seemed to be thoroughly prostrated in strength.

"How is it with you, lass?" inquired the crone.

But the exhausted creature could only look at the questioner with her dim eyes and sigh.

Old Nan went to her rude corner cupboard and poured out a glass of brandy and brought it to the girl, saying heartily:

"Come! Drink this, good wench, and yer'll feel better."

Lona mechanically took the glass and swallowed a mouthful of the brandy, whose fiery strength half strangled her and threw her into a hard fit of coughing.

But it effectually aroused her.

"Oh! oh! oh! give me a sup of milk, Mrs. Crook. My throat is on fire!" she exclaimed, in the midst of her strangling cough.

Old Nan brought the desired emollient, and Lona drank it slowly.

"Now, then, you feel better," said the crone, as she took the empty cup from the girl. "Now do you know what you have been doing?"

"I have been in a trance. I s'pose. I remember you were going to put me in one," replied the girl.

Old Nan went and put away the empty cup, and returned and seated herself beside Lona Pond, inquiring:

"Do you remember where you went and what you did in that trance?"

"No; I wish I did. But I suppose I went to look after Ham. You said you would send me to him."

"Yes, dearie, and so I did," replied Mrs. Crook, with a confidential nod.

"And did I go? And did I see him? And was he alive and well? Oh, tell me what I saw! Oh, how I wish I could remember!"

"Yer must trust in me, my wench. I can tell you everything yer saw," said Old Nan, who never hesitated to tell a falsehood when it suited her convenience to do so.

"Tell me now, Mrs. Crook! Tell me now!"

"Well, lass, yer found yer sweetheart alive and well, and getting rich hand over fist!"

"Oh! Oh! Where was he, then?"

"In the gold country, at t'other end of the world, standing over a shaft full of pure gold, and a winding it up with a windlass by the bucketful, like water out'n a well! Oh, yer'll be rich as rich, yer will, and ride in yer carriage and four, and have diments to wear, and liverymen servants to wait on her!" chuckled Old Nan.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! What a wonderful country that must be where the gold is winded up in bucketful like water

outen a well! What a pity all the poor people can't get at it!" cried Lona, beside herself with wonder and admiration.

"A hundred thousand pities!" exclaimed Old Nan.

Suddenly Lona's face clouded over.

"I wonder does Ham still think of me, when he is growing so rich? Why, he'll be richer than the Earl of Hawtwood himself!"

"A hundred times richer!"

"And richer than the Duke of Grand Manors!"

"A hundred times!"

"And as rich as the royal family, maybe!"

"A great deal richer!"

"Then I think he ought to give the queen some of the gold to help out with the wedding portions of the princesses, you know."

"Yes, and of course a loyal subject like Ham Gow would do that much for the royal family," said Old Nan, with a nod.

"But, oh! I was thinking, will Ham care for me now he is growing so rich?" inquired Lona Pond, with a sigh.

"Care for you? Hear the wench! Why, don't yer see for yerself, how much he cared for yer, when yer watched him at his gold hauling?"

"You forget that I never remember anything in my trances."

"Ah, poor lass! that is true! Woe a pity it is! Well, then I'll tell yer wot yer reported to me, as yer saw in yer clare-wy-and state. Yer saw yer sweetheart stop after hauling up each bucket full of pure yellow gold and pour the gold out on the side of a heap that was growing as big as a haystack, and set down his empty bucket and take yer doggy type out'n his bosom and kiss it twenty times or more and make signs to it, by pointing to the great stack of gold, as much as to say all that gold was for you, and then kiss yer doggy type twenty times more and put it in his bosom, and let down his empty bucket again into the shaft for another bucketful of gold."

"Dear, dear Ham. But had he a partner to divide with? I think I have heard the miners are obliged to have partners. Did I see one? Or how did he get his bucket filled

at the bottom of the shaft? Did I see that?" eagerly demanded Lona.

"Oh, yes! But he didn't have to divide with no partner. He had a native, who didn't care about gold, but would work all day long for a gill of rum."

"Oh! But wasn't that wrong, Mrs. Crook?"

"It would be very wrong here in England, but it would be all right at the other end of the world."

"Would it?"

"In course it would, my gel! It makes all the difference being out there."

"I suppose it does. Mrs. Crook?"

"What, honey?"

"When I saw Ham, did I see him as he was some time ago, or as he is now?"

"As he is now—to-day, this hour, this minute. You may depend that he is standing there, just as yer saw him an hour ago, winding up buckets full of gold, and he won't knock off work until it is dark."

"Right now! To think I should know what he is doing at this selfsame, said, identical minute!" exclaimed Lona, in a glow of wonder and delight.

"Yes, it is a great power."

"It is better than letters, or telegrams, either!"

"A heap better, wench."

"And, Mrs. Crook, whenever I want to hear from Ham I will come here and let you put me in a trance."

"So do, my lass."

"I feel as if I wasn't parted from Ham, now that I can go into a trance and look on him whenever I like! But, oh, if I could only remember when I come out of them! If I could only remember, instead of having to be told by you! Mrs. Crook?"

"Well, lass."

"Does going into a trance do me any harm?"

"Bless the gel! No! What made yer ask?"

"Because I feel so weak when I come out of them, that is all."

"Oh, that is nothing. Yer only tired as if yer'd been ~~for~~ a long walk. And it is a long way to Australia!" added Old Nan, with an effort at pleasantry.

"So 'tis. Well, now, Mrs. Crook, I must be going. The

housekeeper at Hawke Hall gave me a holiday this afternoon, but she bade me be at home before dark. So I must be off. But the very next holiday I can get I mean to come here again to be put in a trance and sent to see Ham."

"So do, my wench. And one thing I may tell you for yer comfort. I hev heerd as clare-woy-ants, after going into many trances, come to a state as makes 'em able to remember all they hev seen or heerd in their trances."

"Oh, I wish I could come into such a state! But, Mrs. Crook, are you sure it is not wrong?"

"Wrong? Bless the wench, no! Why should it be wrong?"

"I didn't know. It was so nice, I was afraid it was wrong. Well, good-by, I am going now," concluded Lona. And she went.

As soon as she was left alone, Old Nan Crook sank down into her armchair and fell into thought.

"Very strange—very strange," she muttered to herself. "Has this experiment been a failure, like the other was, or is there a secret hidden under all this show?"

"I never knowed a clare-woy-ant to go off on a false scent in my life before, and it would be odd if this gel was the very fust one to do it.

"I hev knowed hounds to go off on a false scent afore now; and policemen and detectives is most in general sure to go off on false scents; but I never knowed a clare-woy-ant to do it, never!

"Now, what's the secret of this gel's disclosures? Let me remember how it was in the fust instance. W'en I fust put her into a trance, I sent her off in search of Mrs. Irvine's body. And she followed of it—not to the bottom of the Demondike, or out with the tide, or on to some lonesome beach; no, indeed. But into a first-class carriage on the express train, and up to a great city where it prospered finely, and

"'Dwelt in marble halls,'

and where it lived on the fat of the land, and

"'Walked in silk attire.'"

"That didn't look much like being drowned in Demondike and cast up by the waves on some lonesome part of

the coast! Not a bit! It looked like a scheme, a deception, a conspiracy, or summat of that sort. Ah, if I could only find out the truth about that my fortune would be made! But my mejum failed me just there! Traced her or somebody to some palatial mansion and there lost her! And this palatial mansion might be in London, or Paris, or Rome, or New York, for aught I know.

"And now this last venter hasn't been a bit more successful, as I see! I put my mejum into a mesmeric sleep and send her to look for a certain dead corpse, and she takes arter a living man and follows him to the anterpodys!

"Now, wot is the meaning of it all, anyhow? 'Cording to the clare-woy-ant, nither Mrs. Irvine nor the late Lord Hawkewood is dead at all, but both are living—she living in a palace and dressing in silks and satings every day, and he at t'other end of the world among the gold diggers! This is the case 'cording to the clare-woy-ant, and I never knowed a clare-woy-ant to go off on a false scent yet, though hounds sometimes do, and detectives always sure to do! Yet the clare-woy-ant must be off trail this time. It ain't possible either one of them two can be living, let alone both of 'em.

"I know wot I'll do! I'll put that gel in a trance and send her off arter Ham Gow! He may throw some light on the subject! Besides, I want to hear about him, poor lad! I should have sent her arter him to-day, only I was so anxious to find the earl's body and get the reward that I sent her arter that first (and much I got for my pains), and when she had gone through that search she was too weak to be put into another trance.

"Heigh-ho! It's a rum world!"

With this philosophical remark, Old Nan arose and made up the fire in the fireplace, and filled her kettle with water and hung it over the blaze, preparatory to getting her evening meal.

CHAPTER II

A TERRIBLE NIGHT AND DAY

ON the morning succeeding the evening when Isoline Irvine had been frightened nearly out of her senses by a

real or supposed apparition in the park of Belle Isle, strict inquiries were made among the servants as to whether any of them had been walking in the grounds on that occasion, and it was very satisfactorily ascertained that they were not; on the contrary, that they were all in the servants' hall, engaged in a round game of cards.

Miss Irvine was well laughed at for her supposed hallucination on the subject; but she could not be laughed out of her conviction that she had seen her mother, as she had stated, then and there.

The matter passed out of discussion, and might never have been recalled but for an incident that occurred a few days later.

The lessons for the day were over, and Isoline had come into the library to find a book and to enjoy its quietness.

The library at Belle Isle was a lofty room, running from east to west, along the north wall of the castle, which was here pierced by four tall windows. In the rear or west end of the room was a deep bay window, furnished with ottomans and hung with simple green shades. This window overlooked the thickly wooded plantation behind the castle.

Opposite the bay window, and at the eastern extremity of the room, hung a broad and lofty mirror, which, when these window shades were raised, reflected the scene from the rear, with all its beauty of sunlit clouds and variegated foliage prolonging an indefinite vista.

It is necessary to give this description of the bay window and its opposite reflecting mirror, in order to explain what afterward happened.

When Isoline Irvine came into the library, the room was nearly dark, for all the green shades were down.

She left those at the tall north windows just as she found them, but she drew up those of the bay window, into which the "low descending sun" now poured a flood of burning heat and dazzling light.

She turned away from the glare, selected a book and took it to the front of the room, and ensconced herself in an easy-chair, near the great mirror, where, for the first time since entering the library, she perceived that she was not alone.

Her eldest pupil, Lady Victoria Belle Isle, was seated on

a hassock on the carpet, with a volume of Waverly Novels on her lap, and eyes and mind absorbed in the witchery of "Ivanhoe."

"Do not let me disturb you, dearest," said Isoline, as she opened her book, which was an old-fashioned, charming poem, "Thompson's Seasons."

Lady Victoria did not answer—did not even hear. She was leagues away in space, centuries away in time. She was a spectator at that fearful ordeal by tournament between Ivanhoe and the Templar, upon the issue of which the fate of the Jewess hung.

No other word was spoken between the girls. Both went on reading, while the afternoon sun sank lower and lower, withdrawing its glancing gleams from the room like golden arrows into their quiver.

Then Isoline looked up from her book upon the face of the mirror, where the reflected beauty of the "afterglow" upon clouds and foliage hung like a peerless painting, such as had never been created by human hands.

"Oh, my heart! my heart!—Victoria! Look! look!" she gasped, in suffocating and scarcely articulate tones, as she clutched the young lady's shoulder.

Lady Victoria, violently dragged from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, raised her dark eyes in questioning amazement.

She was facing the mirror, in which she now saw reflected a picture that at once fixed her gaze.

It was the beautiful, pale face of a woman, crowned with

Aureole of ebon locks,

and looking out from the green shades of the foliage.

With an exclamation of astonishment, Lady Victoria dropped her book and ran down the length of the library toward the bay window.

But when she reached it the face was gone.

She threw up the sash and stepped out into the plantation and gazed around, but no sign of a human being was to be seen or heard.

She returned into the library and walked back to the spot where she had left Isoline, and where she now found

the girl kneeling on the carpet, with her head bowed upon the cushioned seat of an armchair.

"I could not find anyone outside the window, Isoline," said the young lady, standing over her friend.

"But you saw it! You saw it as well as I did!" breathed the bowed girl, in an expiring voice.

"Yes, but I could not find anyone outside."

"It is not likely that you should find anyone there; but you saw it!"

"I saw a face at the window reflected in the mirror. Whose was it, Isoline?"

"Did you recognize that face?"

"I thought I did; but I cannot be certain. Whose was it, Isoline?"

"Not that of any mortal being! It was the face of my lost mother, Lady Victoria!"

"Oh, Isoline!"

"It was my dead mother's living face! Oh! and this is the second time I have seen it! Oh! why should I shrink from my mother's face? Yet flesh and blood cannot bear such sights, and I know, if I continue to see it, I shall die! I shall die!" shuddered the girl, with bloodless lips.

"Oh! Isoline, love, it could not have been what you think. That is impossible, you know! It was some face that resembled your mother's. Some stranger must be on the island, and this mystery must be looked into and cleared up. The whole island must be carefully searched for the impostor who is practicing on your fears," said Lady Victoria, in a soothing tone, as she arose and touched the bell.

"Close the shutters and light the lamps," she said to the man who entered in obedience to the summons.

It was now near the end of the short autumn twilight, and the two girls left the library.

"Do not speak of this affair, please, Victoria. I could not bear the discussion of the subject this evening," pleaded Isoline, still trembling excessively.

"I will not since you wish me to be silent; but the grounds ought to be searched for the intruder," remonstrated the young lady.

"It would be useless. No one would be found. Oh,

what does it all mean? What does it mean?" breathed Isoline.

Lady Victoria silently drew her friend's arm within her own and led into the warmed and lighted drawing-room, where all the cheerful family circle were assembled.

And happily, at that moment, the announcement of dinner drew attention away from Isoline and prevented the discovery of her pallor and tremor.

Mr. Ball, of Bowling Green, was expected and waited for.

"He is punctual to a minute. Never thirty seconds too soon or too late. He was invited for eight o'clock, and it is eight now. I cannot think what is the matter," said the duke testily, as they stood around the fire.

At that moment the hall footman threw open the door and announced:

"Mr. Ball!"

And the round little man appeared to answer for himself.

"Fifty seconds too late," said the host, as he advanced with a smile to welcome the guest.

"He should have been a military martinet, duchess. He has missed his vocation," remarked the squire, as, after greeting his host, he went on to pay his respects to his hostess.

"Well, if I am not more punctual at the meet to-morrow let me hear of it, will you?" requested the duke, with a laugh.

"We certainly will do so," rejoined Mr. Ball.

The squire of Bowling Green was Master of the Hounds, and there was to be a grand meet near his place the next morning.

The old squire shook hands with the young ladies, and dinner being announced, he gave his arm to the duchess to take her to the dining-room.

The visit of the old squire to Belle Isle was, in fact, made for the sole purpose of spending the evening with the duke and talking over some minor matters connected with the meet of the next morning.

So, after dinner was over, and the ladies had retired from the table, the two gentlemen sat long over their

claret, not drinking much, but talking a great deal on the subject of hounds, covers and quarries.

They at length joined the ladies in the drawing-room over their tea, but, after partaking of it, excused themselves and withdrew to the smoking room, where they resumed the subject so near to their hearts.

"Oh, how I wish the duke would give up fox hunting!" sighed the duchess to her eldest daughter, when the gentlemen had again left them.

"But he never will, mamma. So it is of no use to wish," replied Lady Hawkewood.

"Then if he would only ride a safe horse; but I gather from his talk that he is going to mount Malignant. It is madness!"

Lady Hawkewood turned a shade paler.

"Can papa really be in earnest in what he says?" she inquired.

"Yes. He declares he will ride Malignant to-morrow. The brute has already killed two men, and the duke says he means to break his vicious spirit."

"'Whom the gods wish to destroy,' etc.," muttered Lady Hawkewood to herself.

"The duke has been a famous horse breaker from his youth up. If any man can tame Malignant, he can. I really do not think you need have any fears for him, madam," said the young Marquis of Belle Isle.

The duchess sighed. She also had the greatest confidence in her husband's power, yet there was the shadow of a coming calamity on her spirit that she could not dispel.

It was quite late when the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room, whither Mr. Ball only came to say good-night.

After the old squire had gone the duchess spoke of the coming meet of the hounds, and endeavored to dissuade the duke from his purpose of riding the vicious horse.

But he laughed lightly at all her fears, as he replied:

"I suppose there must be something of the savage remaining in me which neither civilization nor Christianity has been able to conquer, for certainly I take more delight in taming a bad tempered beast than in any other entertainment that can offer itself. Don't be uneasy, Eleanora.

There will be no danger to me. And now, as I shall be off to the meet to-morrow before you are awake, I will bid you good-night."

And the duke stooped and kissed her—an unusual demonstration on his part—and then took up his bedroom candle, and with a general "good-night" for the rest of the family circle, he left the drawing-room.

The duchess knew that further remonstrance would be quite vain; but she sighed as she followed his example, and went up to her chamber.

This broke up the family circle, every member of which now retired.

The next morning broke very propitiously for the hunt.

The duchess and her pleasant family party assembled at the usual hour around the social breakfast table.

Neither the duke nor the young marquis were present.

They had both left the castle some hours before for the meet at Bowling Green.

After the usual greeting the duchess turned to the footman in attendance and directed him to summon the head groom.

When this last-named functionary appeared at the door of the breakfast parlor the duchess inquired:

"What horse did your master ride to the meet?"

"The white mare, Rose, your grace," replied the groom, humbly.

"Ah! Then, of course, he left Malignant in the stables. I am glad of it," breathed the duchess, with a sigh of relief.

"If your grace pleases——"

"Well, what do you wish to say?"

"Malignant was led to the meet by Suter, the under-groom. My master will mount him for the start."

"Oh! That will do, Bentley. You may go."

The man made a very humble obeisance and withdrew from the room.

The duchess sighed and left her breakfast almost untasted.

But soon an event occurred that put danger out of her mind for a season.

A servant entered with a telegram on a silver waiter, which he laid on the table before his mistress.

"From Northumberland. News from Squire Humber, I presume. How did this come?" inquired her grace, as she broke the seal.

"An office boy brought it over from Hawkeville in the ferryboat, your grace."

The duchess glanced over the dispatch and then read it aloud to her daughters:

"HUMBER HOLD, October 25, 18—.

"Mr. Humber died here at one o'clock A. M. to-day. I shall remain here until after the funeral, the time of which is not yet fixed. I will write by the first mail.

"HAWKEWOOD."

"So he is gone at length, poor old gentleman," said Lady Hawkewood.

"Is the messenger waiting?" inquired the duchess.

"Yes, your grace."

"Then bring me writing materials from the library."

When the servant had obeyed this order, the duchess wrote a hasty acknowledgment of the telegram, as follows:

"CASTLE BELLE ISLE, October 25, 18—.

"We have just received your message announcing the sorrowful intelligence of Mr. Humber's decease. The duke is absent, but shall be immediately summoned. We all offer our sincere sympathy and await your letter.

"ELEANOR BELLE ISLE."

The duchess sent this answer by the same boy who brought the dispatch.

Then she gave orders that a mounted groom should ride full speed to Bowling Green to carry the news to the duke—news that would certainly recall him immediately to the castle.

"And, oh! may Heaven grant that the messenger may find him before the start!" fervently prayed the duchess. "It may be the means of saving his life, by preventing him from mounting Malignant!" she added.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good," and "self-preservation is the first law of nature," so it is to be ques-

tioned whether her grace, the Duchess of Grand Manors, was really very sorry for the death of the old squire, which created an imperative necessity for the duke's immediate return from what she considered his most perilous expedition.

Her only anxiety now was that her messenger should find his grace at the meet and before the start.

She had every reason to believe that such would be the case, since it oftener happened than not that the quarry was not uncovered until high noon.

Her grace waited in extreme anxiety until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when Bentley, the groom, returned alone.

The duchess had issued orders that if the man should come back without his master he should be sent to her presence immediately.

Consequently the groom promptly presented himself to the duchess.

"Well, you found his grace?" said the lady.

"No, madam, if you please—his grace had gone. The fox had burst cover as early as ten o'clock, and had taken a northwesterly course toward the Hawkewood Hall fields, and the whole hunt had passed out of reach in that direction. I left your note to his grace with the butler at Bowling Green, to give his grace when the gentlemen all return there to dinner, and then I came back here for further orders, madam."

"Quite right; but I have no further orders to give just yet. You may go."

The groom bowed deferentially and withdrew.

The duchess walked up and down the floor, wringing her hands and muttering:

"It is a fatality! Why should the start have been made two hours earlier than usual?"

"Mamma! Mamma! You will make yourself ill! Why should you torture yourself by unnecessary anticipations of evil?" inquired Lady Hawkewood, who was seated at her embroidery frame near one of the windows.

"Because I cannot help it, Volante. My soul is shadowed and oppressed by a foreboding of calamity that I cannot shake off," replied the agitated wife, without stopping in her restless walk.

"But this is very morbid, dear mamma. Your own reason should teach you that it is. You are afraid of Malignant. But papa is no boy to permit himself to be thrown by a vicious horse. Papa's horsemanship is unsurpassed in England. No horse has ever yet been able to resist him successfully."

"That is true. Yet there is a homely proverb concerning the pitcher that goes too often to the spring. Your papa is not so strong as he was in earlier life. What disturbance is that outside in the courtyard?" suddenly exclaimed the duchess, breaking off and turning pale.

"Oh, dear mamma, it is nothing to alarm you. I suppose papa has had your message and has come back. I will see," said Lady Hawkewood, and she left the room for the purpose, while the duchess sank down on the sofa and waited.

As Lady Hawkewood hastened toward the head of the grand staircase she heard hasty, irregular footsteps ascending them, and the next instant was stopped by her young brother, the Marquis of Belle Isle, pallid, staring, trembling, like one distraught by woe.

"For Heaven's sake, Belle Isle, what is the matter with you? Where is papa?" demanded the countess, in sudden alarm.

"That vicious brute—— Where is mamma? Go to her. Keep her in her room, if possible! Do not let her come out yet a while. I have sent for Ellis!" exclaimed the young marquis, with incoherent snatches of words.

"Papa!—that horse!—has an accident happened? Speak, for Heaven's sake!" cried the countess, in a breathless agony of suspense.

"Do not ask me! Go to mamma! Keep her quiet until Ellis and Dr. Vincent get here."

"But I cannot! I cannot until I know—— Has an accident happened?" panted the countess.

"Yes! yes! Now go to mamma!" cried the young man, trying to break from her grasp.

"A—a—fatal accident?" she gasped, turning gray pale even to the lips, and tightening her hold upon him.

"Oh! There she is now! There is mamma!—mamma!—dearest mamma!" cried the young man, in a voice

of anguish, as he flew to support the tottering form of the duchess, who, livid, rigid, agonized, stood before them.

"The duke—the duke——" she muttered hoarsely, but could say no more.

"The duke has been thrown from his horse and killed!" exclaimed the voice of a frantic, foolish, hysterical housemaid who was hurrying up the stairs upon some domestic errand.

"The lunatic!" indignantly exclaimed the young son. "Mamma! Mamma!" he cried, bending tenderly toward the hapless lady whose head nestled on his shoulder. "Mamma! Dearest mamma!"

But the heavy form of the duchess slipped from his embrace upon the floor, at his feet.

Her son and daughter stooped instantly to raise her.

But the Duchess of Grand Manors was dead!

CHAPTER III

A DAY OF DOOM

THERE was no mistaking death in a case like this. In the ghastly hue, in the glazed and fixed eyes, and in the fallen chin, the agonized son and daughter saw the death of their mother!

Stupefied with sudden sorrow, they tenderly lifted the body, bore it into the adjoining room, laid it on a couch, and knelt beside it, mutely using all those simple means of restoration that first occur to the mind under such circumstances, yet feeling all the while how vain such efforts must be.

In the midst of their despairing endeavors, Dr. Ellis hurriedly, yet quietly, entered the room.

With a silent, anxious greeting, the brother and sister arose from their knees and made way for the physician.

With a mute gesture of acknowledgment the doctor knelt over his patient—his patient no longer.

Her son and daughter watched him in an agony of suspense that had scarcely hope enough in it to keep them on the rack.

"It is as I feared," spoke the doctor, after a short but effectual examination.

"She is—our mother is——" began the son, in a voice faint and breaking down with anguish.

"Gone—she is gone. I have known for years past that she has had heart disease, and that any sudden shock—Look to your sister, my lord!" cried the doctor, shortly breaking off from his explanation; for the young countess, with a wail of anguish, had rushed out of the room.

The young gentleman hastened out. He passed the Vicar of Hawkeville, Dr. Vincent, who was coming in.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed the physician, who, in a few words, gave the clergyman an account of the double tragedy which had so suddenly overwhelmed the happy but fated household.

"Never in my whole life's experience has calamity so swiftly, and with such destroying malice, fallen upon a good family. The father brought home a corpse from the hunting field; the mother dropping dead under the shock."

"How did the accident happen?" inquired Dr. Vincent, in a voice scarcely above his breath.

"The duke rode Malignant, the wild Irish horse that no one has yet succeeded in mastering. But the duke, you know, has been a famous horse breaker in his time."

"Yes," said the clergyman; "but I should judge that his grace has not been so strong within the last two or three years as formerly."

"No, no, certainly he has not; and it is to that circumstance we must attribute the tragic ending of his ride to-day," assented the physician.

"But how, exactly, did the catastrophe occur?" again inquired the parson.

"As nearly as I can gather from the confused accounts, it happened in this manner: The duke had completely conquered the wild beast and had ridden him successfully all day. They killed the fox about five o'clock near the head of Demondike, and the hunters were returning leisurely to Bowling Green, where the company were engaged to dine, when, as they neared the old Ruined Tower, the duke's horse, Malignant, suddenly took fright at the apparition of Old Nan Crook, who stood in the path like another Witch of Endor, with her blazing red hood and blue cloak."

"She was enough to frighten a quieter horse than Malignant," said Dr. Vincent.

"She startled him effectually. He reared with terror and then plunged and tore away into a furious gallop, his hoofs thundering on the echoing and shaking ground long after the horse was out of sight. The duke kept his seat and exerted all his strength to hold in the terrified and frantic brute, and so passed from view."

"But was no effort made by his companions to—to—to——"

"To do what? To stop that cyclone on four legs? No, nothing could have been done. Had his companions—all, or any of them—ridden after him, in the vain thought of arresting the furious speed of the horse, their action would have hastened the catastrophe, by rendering the situation, which was doubtful and dangerous, certain and fatal. They did go after the duke, however, as soon as it was deemed safe to him for them to do so. They hoped to find him safe with his exhausted or conquered horse. But—they found him lying on the ground near the upper end of the ferry road—dead—quite dead!"

"How awfully shocking!"

"The horse was gone——"

"Took the road in his flight."

"Yes, to the water side. There he was seen by the ferryman, who sent a messenger up the ferry road to make inquiries for his master. The messenger met the party who had just discovered the accident, and were then bringing the dead body of the duke on a hastily constructed litter to the ferryboat. And so it was brought on to the castle."

"Awful! Awful! And the duchess?"

"She has had heart disease for some years. I knew that any sudden shock, or violent emotion, would be likely to be fatal to her. And such a terrible shock as this might have killed a perfectly healthy woman."

"Indeed it well might! But, Dr. Ellis, how happened it that you were so promptly here?"

"One of the men who discovered the dead body of the duke had the forethought to ride directly on to Hawkeville and summon me. But I might return the question, and ask by what fortunate chance are you here so opportunely?"

"It was providential. I came to make an ordinary call, not even suspecting that anything had happened. I learn, also, that the duchess received a telegram this morning announcing the demise of old Mr. Humber, of Humber Hold."

"Yes. The event has been long looked for. Members of the family seem to have been stricken down to-day like birds by a scattering shot."

As the two gentlemen conversed they had not been idle.

Dr. Ellis occupied himself with carefully arranging and composing the form of the dead duchess upon the lounge, and covering it entirely over with a silken sofa quilt that lay close at hand.

Dr. Vincent was going quietly from window to window, closing the shutters, and letting down the curtains.

"Will an inquest be necessary?" inquired the minister, when he had finished his work.

"Oh, no; not at all. The cause of death in both cases is too patent. I shall give certificates, and speak to the coroner, and save the family such annoyance. Shall we close the room now?"

"As you please," replied Dr. Vincent.

And the two gentlemen left the chamber of death, closing and locking the door after them.

The tumult of woe and horror throughout the castle baffles all description.

The bereaved children of the departed duke and duchess were assembled in one room, some violently excited, some quite stupefied with amazement and grief.

Isoiline Irvine, striving to keep down her own emotions of sorrow, devoted herself to them.

The household servants went about their duties with noiseless steps, silent lips and tearful eyes.

Dr. Ellis, Dr. Vincent and Mr. Ball took full direction of affairs, and telegraphed the terrible news to the family solicitor in London, to the Earl of Hawkewood at Humber Hold, and to Lieut. Cosmo Belle Isle at Portsmouth, and to other distant relatives and friends of the afflicted family.

Later in the evening the undertaker and his assistants arrived at the castle, and immediately set about their sad duties.

The mortal remains of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors were prepared and laid in state in the long drawing-room, and watchers appointed to guard the sacred relicts through the night.

The sorrowful children of the noble pair remained in one room together, united by their great common affliction.

Mr. Ball, Dr. Vincent and Dr. Ellis sat up in the library.

The servants were all at their posts.

No one thought of going to bed that night.

Late as it had been in that afternoon when the telegrams had been sent off, answers came in from many of them before midnight.

The first that came was from the London lawyer. It was sent to Dr. Vincent, and after expressing sympathy for the family in their bereavement, announced the speedy arrival of the sender.

The second was from Cosmo Belle Isle to Dr. Ellis, who said that he was stricken to the heart with grief at this great double bereavement, but would get leave of absence and start for the castle instantly.

The third was from the Earl of Hawkewood to Mr. Ball, saying that the sad news of the two sudden deaths had filled his soul with grief and dismay, and that he should leave for Hawkeville by the first southern bound train.

During the course of the next day friends and relatives began to arrive at the castle.

The Earl of Hawkewood, though he was the farthest off, was the first to reach the castle.

After shaking hands with the three gentlemen, who had so kindly remained on the watch in the stricken home, the earl sent a message upstairs to his wife, notifying her of his arrival and begging to see her.

At any other time, Volante would have sent an insolent reply, or would have treated his request with silent contempt.

Now, however, with her heart almost broken by sorrow, she sent word to her husband that she was ill and suffering, and begged that he would excuse her for the present.

The earl explained to the doctor that he had only come

on a flying visit for this occasion, to arrange the day of the funeral, so that it should come in the latter part of the week, for that he was obliged to go back to Northumberland first to attend the obsequies of his grandfather, which were to be solemnized on the Thursday of this week; after which he would be at liberty to return to Castle Belle Isle to pay the last tribute of respect to the memory of the late duke and duchess.

The second arrival was that of Cosmo Belle Isle, who came on a fortnight's leave, and meant to spend the whole of it with his afflicted cousins.

Soon after the lieutenant came the family solicitor, who immediately by authority took the head of affairs.

The Earl of Hawkewood remained all day, and went away early the next morning, without having seen his wife, who still, making illness her plea, persisted in excusing herself from receiving him.

The day succeeding the return of the Earl of Hawkewood to Northumberland, the mortal remains of the old Squire of Humber Hold were conveyed to his family vault.

On the night following that day the Earl of Hawkewood, leaving Humber Hold in charge of his steward, took the late train for the south, and in the afternoon of Friday reached Castle Belle Isle.

The funeral of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors took place on Saturday.

It was one of the most solemn and imposing pageants that had ever been witnessed in that neighborhood.

Not only did all the county families attend in mourning coaches, but many of the nobility and gentry from other parts of the country, and one of the princes came, on the part of the royal family.

An archbishop performed the funeral services. It was just at the hour of sunset when the mortal remains of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors were lowered into the family vault beneath the little chapel attached to Castle Belle Isle.

When the funeral guests returned to the castle, the will of the late duke was produced by the family solicitor and read in the presence of the assembled family, friends and domestics.

We have before hinted that the Duke of Grand Manors was not a wealthy man.

He had not much at his disposal to leave. The family estate, however, was charged with the support and education of his minor children until they should become of age, at which time each child was to receive a small portion. Little legacies were also left to old and faithful servants. But the bulk of the estate went with the title to his grace's eldest son and heir—Theobald-Harold-John, Marquis of Belle Isle, and now the Duke of Grand Manors.

Mr. Oliver Ball, of Bowling Green, and the Rev. Dr. James Vincent, Vicar of Hawkeville, were appointed trustees of the estate and guardians of the minor children.

The will was acknowledged by all to be just and generous.

After the reading was over the friends and guests of the family partook of an excellent collation in the dining-room, and then dispersed to their several homes.

The ladies of Castle Belle Isle had not been seen by any of the visitors. They had kept their rooms, except during the funeral services and afterward during the reading of the will, but their faces had, on both these occasions, been completely hidden beneath the folds of their thick and heavy black crape veils, and immediately after that reading was over they had retired, to be seen no more by strangers.

But Dr. Vincent and Dr. Ellis went to bid them good-by before leaving the castle, and were received with grateful affection by the sorrowing girls, who then begged the clergyman and the physician to come again, and to come often.

When the company had all gone, there remained in the castle but a few inmates. There was the young Duke of Grand Manors and his brothers and sisters. There was the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood, and there were Lieut. Cosmo Belle Isle and Miss Isoline Irvine.

And even this little household circle was soon to be broken up.

It was the intention of the Earl of Hawkewood to return with his countess to Hawkewood Hall.

The young Duke of Grand Manors was to return to Oxford to complete his course. His brothers were to go to Eton. His young sisters, including the infants in the nursery, were to go into the family of their uncle, the arch-

bishop. Cosmo Belle Isle was to return to his regiment, and Isoline Irvine—ah! where was she to go?

She did not know, nor had she given a single thought to the subject. She was too deeply absorbed in sympathy with the sorrows of her young friends.

But no move could well be made while the young people of the family were so prostrated by grief.

But in the second week after the deaths, and as the lieutenant's leave of absence was drawing to a close, the question that Isoline had never put to herself was suggested by another.

It was on the first occasion after their bereavement that the family had all assembled together at the breakfast table.

When, after the morning meal was over, they were about to withdraw from the room, and Isoline turned to follow them out, Cosmo took her hand and said, in a low tone, and with a pleading gaze:

"I want you to come and take a little walk with me on the terrace. Will you come?"

"Yes," murmured Isoline, in reply.

And he drew her arm within his own and led her through one of the French windows out upon the terrace.

"Isoline," he began, as they walked up and down in the pleasant morning sunshine—"Isoline, the castle is to be deserted, or left only in the charge of the servants next week. I know the destination of every man and woman, boy, girl and baby of the house except yours. I have not heard yours."

"Mine?" she inquired, looking at him in perplexity.

"Your plans, I mean. What are your plans?"

"Plans? About what?"

"About yourself, dearest. About yourself and your future home."

"I have no plans."

"But you know that this household will be broken up next week."

"Yes, I know."

"Where do you think of going when the others leave?"

"I—I—indeed, I never gave the subject a thought," said the girl, with perfect frankness.

"Oh, child! child! You never thought for yourself, and

no one ever thought for you!" he exclaimed, in pity and sorrow.

"But no one has had time to do that. Everyone has had so much trouble," said the girl, in defense of her friends.

Cosmo made a gesture of impatience, and then said:

"Isoline, dearest, do you know that my regiment sails for Australia on the first of next month?"

"I—I—yes, I heard so. I hoped, perhaps, that it was not true, or that something might happen to prevent it," Isoline murmured, in the faltering tones that betrayed her emotion.

"Nothing can happen to prevent it now. My dear uncle's sudden death has cut off all my source of influence and all my hope of help. He has not even mentioned me in his will. I fear I must have deeply offended him, Isoline," he sighed.

"But I do not think so. I never heard the duke utter one word of blame or even of criticism concerning you," said the girl.

"No, probably not. Uncle would never have spoken of offense, no matter how deeply I might have offended him. He would have 'died and made no sign,' as the proverb has it."

"But how could you have offended him, Cosmo?"

"Why, by resigning from the navy, and spending all my little patrimony as soon as it came into my possession, in purchasing a commission in the army."

"But why did you do that, Cosmo?"

"For many cogent reasons, love. In the first place, I do not like the navy, and I do like the army. In the second place, promotion is too slow and doubtful in the navy, and it might be many years before I could hope to get my ship, or I could hope to marry. In the third place, even when I should at some late period of my life be able to marry, the nature of the service would separate me from my wife more than half the time. She could never accompany me. Now, with the army it is different. Promotions are quicker and surer. I could marry at any time, provided my love should love me enough to share my poverty and privations in the earlier days; and I could take her with me wherever she would be willing to go! There!

That is the reason why I prefer to serve in the army rather than in the navy. Don't you think they are good reasons?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do!" exclaimed the young girl, with hearty frankness.

"Well, I have acted on these reasons. It is true, I did not expect that my regiment would be ordered to Australia. But since such is the case, I must not back out by trying to get exchanged into another regiment, or anything of that sort. Besides, I could not effect it, even if I should try to do so. I have no influence, now uncle is gone."

"I am very, very sorry," said Isoline, in tones that were more eloquent than words.

"But, Isoline, I can take my wife with me to Australia, if I please," he added, with a smile. "That is, if she should be willing to go with me."

Isoline did not reply. She understood him too well. And he also comprehended her silence.

He took her hand and whispered his next question:

"Isoline, will you be my wife and go with me to Australia?"

If she did not answer, it was because she could not, just then. Her voice was choked with emotion.

"Isoline, it depends upon ourselves to be happy. Neither you nor I have anyone but ourselves to consult. What say you? We should have some few privations and hardships to endure, but, as for me, I do not think there is a privation in the world so distressing to lovers as the privation of each other's society, nor any hardship half so hard to bear as parting! What do you think?"

"I—I—agree with you. Parting would be the hardest to bear," she said, speaking with great difficulty.

"Then, darling, we shall not part, shall we?"

"No," she murmured, softly.

"You will be my wife and go with me to Australia?"

"Yes," she answered, sweetly and clearly. "I will be your wife and go with you."

And, not at all suiting the action to the word, she slipped away from his arms and glided back into the house.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOVERS

As soon as Isoline had left him, Cosmo Belle Isle strolled into the house in search of the young duke.

"I must tell Grand Manors at once. So much is due him. I hope the boy will not consider our action as any disrespect to the memory of the late duke and duchess. He must see the necessity of the course," he said to himself.

He came upon his cousin wandering aimlessly about the halls and corridors of the castle, and looking very dejected.

"Come, John, let us go into the smoking room and have a pipe together, old man. I have something to communicate to you, as the head of the family," he said, taking his cousin's arm and leading him toward the den in question.

The young duke groaned as he yielded to the impulse. Any allusion to his new dignity seemed to wound the sensitive heart still suffering with grief for the loss of his parents.

Arrived in the smokery, Cosmo Belle Isle drew from its corner the comfortable easy-chair which had once been the peculiar seat of the late duke, and pushed his successor into it, and proceeded to light a pipe, which he handed to him, saying, as he took another seat and began to fill another pipe:

"You know, old fellow, that I sail with my regiment for Hobart Town on the first of the month."

"Yes; and I am very sorry for it, Cosmo. If there is anything I can do——"

"You cannot do anything, John. You are a minor, you know."

"Yes, I know," sighed the young duke. "How long do you expect to remain out there? A year? two years? three?"

"Whew! You had better ask: A century? two centuries? three? Ah, John, the convicts are not the only 'lifers' sent out there!"

"I knew the regiments sent to Australia often remained abroad for many years."

"Ah, yes! If they have a change, it is from one Australian station to another. I scarcely expect to return at all—certainly not for a great while."

"I am truly grieved that you should go to so great a distance for so long an absence, just at this juncture! Could you not exchange into another regiment?"

"No, that would never do for me."

"But it is often done."

"I repeat that it would not do for me."

"Cosmo, old fellow, we are of the same blood, and we owe each other something on that score. Now, if money would do this thing and keep you near us, I am sure my guardians would advance it; or if they wouldn't, the Jews would, of course, and under such circumstances I should not hesitate to call in the aid of the Jews," said the young duke, earnestly, for he was very much attached to his cousin.

"Thanks, dear fellow! You are a good sort! But this is not a question of finance, John. It is a question of honor, duty, character. Under the circumstances, I should hold it as selfish, cowardly and utterly unworthy of a soldier to attempt to shirk a disagreeable duty in that manner. And under my circumstances it would be reprehensible in the highest degree. It would be unpardonable."

"I do not see why," said the young duke.

"What? Listen, then: After having received a training for the navy, the first thing I did, on reaching my majority, was to resign my position in that service and to spend my whole small patrimony in purchasing a commission in the army, thus throwing away and rendering useless the training of many years, and laying myself open to the charge of levity and instability, and losing the confidence of my uncle."

"Oh, no, I do not think you lost my father's good opinion, Cosmo," interrupted the young duke.

"At any rate, I risked all that by so strangely leaving the navy and joining the army. But, then, I disliked the navy for more reasons than I have time to state at present, and I liked the army for every reason. But having made this change, I must not attempt to make another, lest I utterly ruin my reputation for firmness and stability. I have joined the army. My regiment is ordered

to Hobart Town, and I must go with it. It was with no thought of evading that duty that I sought this interview with you, John."

"What was it, then, old boy? Speak out. Anything that I can do——"

"You can do nothing, John, except to bid me God speed! You can do that. The fact is, my dear John, I think of taking a wife with me," Cosmo explained, in a low voice, and with a slight flush.

"Eh! What! A wife? Whew! Who is the—unhappy lady?" inquired the young duke.

Cosmo's flush deepened as he answered:

"The 'unhappy' lady is Miss Irvine."

"I beg your pardon, old fellow! I meant no offense. I was not even half in earnest, although the idea of a young lady going out to that land of wild beasts and wilder men, convicts and convict drivers, is, to say the least of it, appalling!"

"I know it is; but it is the least of two great evils, the other alternative being a separation for many years, if not forever, between my love and me. I have laid the whole case before Isoline. Well, she prefers to go with me, as I certainly prefer to take her. The only other circumstance to be considered is——" Here Cosmo paused and hesitated.

"Is what, old man? Come, speak out!"

"Is—well, that I shall be obliged, as a matter of etiquette, to marry Miss Irvine before I take her out with me."

"Bless my soul, I should think so! Whatever do you mean?"

"Only that, as our regiment is to sail on the first of the month, and there are but fifteen days intervening, you might think it wanting in respect to the memory of my dear uncle and aunt for us to marry so soon after their departure from us," Cosmo explained, gravely.

The young duke did not at once reply. Any allusion to his lost parents always deeply disturbed him.

After a few moments, however, he said:

"All the circumstances justify and more than justify your speedy marriage—they enforce it upon you. You can put off the ceremony until the day before the ship is to

sail, and you can have it performed as quietly as possible. But Cuthbert and Victoria must attend you and Isoline to the altar, and I must give away the bride. And, Cosmo, dear old boy, if there is any way in which I can aid you, let me know, will you?"

The young lieutenant grasped his cousin's hand and pressed it warmly as he answered:

"Only this—for which I should feel very grateful, as I do for all your kindness, John—I wish you to break this news to Lady Hawkewood and Lady Victoria, and make them understand the necessity of the case, so that they may not misconstrue our motives, or censure our course."

"They could not do that, but I will speak to them, all the same. Now is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, best of friends and kinsmen, there is not," replied Cosmo.

Then they talked of the voyage and the extra outfit that would be required for both bridegroom and bride.

"I suppose the regulations of the service will post you as to your needs; but you had better consult some one who is experienced on this subject as to what Isoline will want, for remember that the voyage takes from four to six months, and takes you through every extreme of season, from an almost Arctic winter to a torrid summer and back again," said the young duke.

"Yes, really, I must see about that," assented Cosmo Belle Isle, gravely, as if he felt the cares and responsibilities of a husband already settling upon him.

"Come to think of it, no! You are not to 'see about that' at all! It is the ladies' province to look after the bride's outfit—ordinary or extraordinary. My sisters will attend to the matter, and it will serve to rouse them from their deep dejection. Ah, Cosmo, it is a providential circumstance that the interests and responsibilities of life continually claim attention and force us from the contemplation of our losses," said the young duke, with a half-suppressed sigh, as he secretly resolved to give his sister *carte blanche* to outfit their young friend at his own expense.

The lieutenant pressed the hand of the speaker in silent gratitude, who thereupon arose with a smile, and said:

"The sooner I speak to Volante and Victoria the better!

I know there is no time to be lost, for it took my sister about four months to prepare her marriage outfit, and she did not have to go to Australia, either!"

"Ah, but Lady Volante Belle Isle was a duke's daughter, destined to become an earl's bride, while my beloved is only a curate's orphan about to become a poor lieutenant's wife," replied Cosmo, with an answering smile.

"At all events, there is no time to be lost, and besides I wish to rouse my sisters by giving them something to do immediately," concluded the young duke, as he laid down his pipe, threw off his smoking cap and left the room to seek the ladies.

He found them all assembled in the boudoir of the Countess of Hawkewood.

He sat down among them and at once told his news.

The effect was even more startling than he had anticipated.

They were all filled with astonishment at the prospect of Cosmo Belle Isle's and Isoline Irvine's impending marriage, and—at first—with the deepest dismay at the idea of the bride's long voyage to the antipodes and her future residence in Van Dieman's Land among savages, bush-rangers and convicts.

But their brother, smiling at their consternation, assured them that if Beelzebub is not half so black as he is painted, neither is Hades half so horrible. He told them, with some little pardonable exaggeration, that Van Dieman's Land was a Garden of Eden and paradisal woods and waters, hills and valleys, fruits and flowers, birds and animals; that the earth was filled with fragrance and the air with music, and the whole island redolent of health, happiness and long life—"to the well-disposed and law-abiding citizen"—he added, as a mental reservation, under his breath.

"It may be all that! It may be all that! It may be a paradise on earth; but it is a paradise peopled by demons and evil spirits," exclaimed Lady Hawkewood.

"And we cannot send our angel to live among such," added Lady Victoria.

"Isoline need never to see a bushman or a convict unless she should please to do so," replied the young duke. "She

would have the society of the most cultivated among the colonists."

"Squatters and ticket-of-leave people!" interrupted Lady Hawkewood.

"No, my dear sister, but the families of respectable emigrants, and of government officials, besides the ladies and officers of the regiment," explained the young duke, who took great pains to reconcile his relatives to the projected marriage and voyage.

"Well," at length admitted Lady Hawkewood, "I am glad the place is not so dreadful as we had imagined."

"And since we cannot prevent Isoline from going, the next best thing we can do is to set about making her comfortable for the voyage," added Lady Victoria.

"Sensibly spoken, my dear little sister!" exclaimed the young duke, approvingly.

"She will want a thousand and one things for her outfit on such a voyage; but there are houses in London where we can procure everything needed already made, and where they can tell us much more than we could ever find out what will be needed. I think, Volante, we will take Isoline and go up to London to-morrow for a few days to purchase her outfit," said Lady Victoria.

The plan was approved by her sister and brother.

The young duke bent down to the countess and in a low tone expressed his wish and intention to be the banker for this occasion.

Then he left them, and in going from the room passed Isoline Irvine, who was coming in.

A glance at her serenely happy face proved that she did not suspect him of possessing the secret of her impending marriage.

The duke nodded, smiled and passed on.

The girl entered the boudoir and joined her young companions, who received her with smiles—really, smiles—such as she had not seen on any of their faces since their heavy double bereavement—peculiar smiles, that aroused her suspicions, caused her to look conscious, and constrained her to ask what amused them so much.

"Ah, you witch, you know very well!" said Lady Victoria, springing up impulsively and throwing her arms around Isoline's neck. "You see, we have heard all about

it! Cosmo, the vain fellow, could not keep his happiness to himself! He would have died if he had not told John! John would have suffocated if he had not told us. And the result is that Volante, you and myself are going up to town to-morrow to get the trousseau for the wedding and the outfit for the voyage!"

And here Victoria's strength gave way and she burst into tears and wept from so many mixed emotions that she herself could not have rationally explained the cause of her agitation.

But soon she wiped her sparkling eyes and smiled again. The programme was carried out.

Lord Hawkewood happened to be called to Northumberland on business connected with the estate he had just inherited there, and he was to be absent for a week.

This circumstance was a great relief to the countess, whose relations with the earl were still of the coldest, most distant and reserved nature.

Upon the plea of indisposition she had confined herself to her room, and declined to see her husband.

The earl had written notes to her remonstrating with her upon the injustice of this conduct toward him, but the notes had always been returned to him unopened and inclosed in a blank envelope.

The earl had repeatedly sought the family physician and taken counsel with him on the subject.

But Dr. Ellis had declined to interfere in the matter, and had earnestly recommended patient inactivity for the present on the part of his lordship.

Then the call to Northumberland had come, and Lord Hawkewood had left Castle Belle Isle without taking leave of his lady; but probably consoling himself with the thought that at the breaking up of the household his refractory countess would be compelled by circumstances to return with him to Hawkewood Hall and conduct herself in a more rational manner.

In view of this impending separation of the family, Lady Hawkewood had settled upon no distinct course of action.

She was still resolved to keep aloof from her husband until she could have a legal separation from him; though now that the parents on whose protection and assistance

she had relied were taken from her, she scarcely knew what steps to take to secure the desired object.

Nor did she know whither she should go on the closing up of the castle—whether she should accompany her younger sisters to their new home with their uncle, the archbishop, or whether she should invite herself to spend a few weeks with her parents' old neighbors, the Balls, of Bowling Green.

But on one subject she was resolved—never to return to Hawkewood Hall.

Just now, however, her personal troubles were forgotten in her ardent sympathy and active co-operation with Isoline Irvine in the preparation for the orphan's marriage and voyage.

On the morning after the conversation just related, Lady Hawkewood, Lady Victoria Belle Isle and Isoline Irvine, all attended by the youthful Duke of Grand Manors, went up by an early train to London, and engaged rooms at a West End hotel.

And immediately after luncheon the ladies drove to an extensive warehouse in Oxford Street, celebrated for its specialty in wedding trousseaus and India outfits.

Here were complete sets for from fifty to five hundred pounds.

Isoline had drawn out her money from the Hawkeville bank, amounting in all to about two hundred pounds, and in her modesty and discretion she would have selected a plain but good outfit, costing about seventy-five pounds; but the Countess of Hawkewood and Lady Victoria completely overruled her and insisted that they knew better than she did, and they must therefore be intrusted with making the selections.

Isoline sighed in acquiescence, as she put her purse in the countess's hands, with a deprecating look that seemed to implore her ladyship to be moderate.

Lady Hawkewood took the purse, with a smile, asked the saleswoman for a list book, and, having procured one, retired to some little distance from her companions, and with lead pencil in fingers, marked the very best and most extensive bridal and India outfits in the establishment.

"Send these articles to me at the Cambridge Hotel and

the bill with them," she said to the saleswoman, as she returned the book and pencil and rejoined her companions.

From the outfitting warehouse they went to other stores, where they ordered great sea trunks and all necessities for the long voyage and the colonial residence.

And finally they got back to the hotel, where the young duke joined them in time for a late dinner.

Their orders at the various warehouses and factories where they had purchased goods were so well and so promptly filled that they found their business in London completed on the evening of the second day.

The next morning they returned to Castle Belle Isle.

In consideration of the fact that the young lieutenant would be obliged to join his regiment one week before the ship would sail for Australia, it was decided to make a change in the day fixed for the marriage ceremony, and to have it performed quietly in the parish church at Hawkeville on the morning of Cosmo's departure for Portsmouth, so that his bride might accompany him.

Cosmo meanwhile had been corresponding with some of his more experienced friends in regard to his marriage and his voyage. Among the rest he had written to the surgeon of his regiment, who had been on duty in Australia before, and who, in reply, among other items, wrote:

"My wife says that it will be absolutely necessary for your bride to take out a maid with her, so as not to depend on a convict servant, who, in nine cases out of ten, would rob her."

This necessity had not, until the receipt of the surgeon's letter, occurred to anyone concerned.

Now Cosmo mentioned the matter to his eldest cousin, Lady Hawkewood, who at once summoned the housekeeper and commissioned her to find a suitable young woman to go out to Australia as lady's maid to the future Mrs. Cosmo Belle Isle.

On the morning succeeding this event, as Isoline Irvine sat alone in her chamber, engaged in looking over and destroying some old letters, she was told that a young person in deep mourning, and apparently also in deep trouble, wished to see Miss Irvine.

"Who is she?" inquired the young lady, thinking, per-

haps, that it was some one who had come about the lady's maid's place.

"I really do not know, ma'am. She is a stranger to us all. When I inquired her name she said it was of no consequence. Shall I tell her that you are engaged, ma'am?" inquired Mrs. Greylock, who had brought the message.

"No," said Isoline Irvine. "Show her up."

CHAPTER V

A LITTLE LIGHT ON A DARK MYSTERY

A SLENDER girl in deep mourning entered the room, courtesied respectfully, and drew aside her heavy black crape veil, revealing the thin, white face, light-blue eyes and pale-yellow hair of Leonora Pond.

Miss Irvine arose quickly and held out her hand to her former maid, exclaiming:

"Lona! Lona Pond, my dear girl, I am so surprised and so pleased to see you. Sit down, child; don't stand. You have had a long walk if you came on foot from Hawkewood," she added, kindly.

"Yes, ma'am, I walked from Hawkewood, and do feel a bit spent," replied the girl, with another deep courtesy.

"Then sit down at once. You look far from strong."

The girl courtesied a third time, and, with a very humble and deprecating air, took a cushioned footstool and seated herself on it.

"Now tell me what I can do for you, Lona," said the young lady.

"I thank you, ma'am. You may have heard that I have lost my stepmother, ma'am," said the girl, quietly, raising her light eyes to the face of her former mistress.

"Yes, dear Lona, I heard it, and I should have gone to see you in your trouble but for the double bereavement that afflicted this family at the time and kept me here," said Miss Irvine, with a feeling of compunction at the thought of having neglected the poor orphan in her sorrow.

The next words of Lona Pond absolved her from blame:

"I knew you would have come to me but for the trouble in the castle. And mother's death was very sudden. Apo-

plexy, Dr. Ellis said it was, and it was all over so soon—funeral and all.”

“I am very sorry for you, Lona.”

“I know you are very kind, ma’am. She was only my stepmother, to be sure, and a stepmother ain’t like a real mother, and I used to think she was unkind to me; but still she was the only friend and protector I had in the world, and now she’s gone, I think that she was not so unkind after all, and that her strictness was meant for my good, and that I myself was often perverse and undutiful. Death opens our eyes sometimes, ma’am, and makes us feel very different toward them that are gone.”

“It does, indeed, Lona! I know that from my own experience. The worst part of our grief for the departed is oftentimes remorse, or, at least, compunction. We are none of us as good as we ought to be to each other, and we never find it out until it is too late. But, Lona, my dear girl, what can I do for you?”

“If you please, ma’am, I came about the place. Mrs. Caraway has been inquiring for a lady’s maid to go out with you to Australia, ma’am,” said the girl, rising, and courtesying very demurely.

“Oh, sit down. Do you know of any suitable person who would like to take the situation?” inquired Miss Irvine.

“If you please, ma’am, I should like to take it myself if you please to think I would do,” said Lona, humbly and deprecatingly, as she resumed her seat.

“You, Lona? Do you really wish to go to Australia with me?” inquired the young lady, in great surprise.

“Oh, yes, indeed, ma’am, if you please! I wish to go very much, if you would only condescend to take me!” replied the girl, clasping her thin hands in the earnestness of her appeal.

“But do you know what sort of a country this Australia is?” continued the lady.

“Oh, yes, ma’am, I do! I know it is a wild wilderness, full of black, savage barbarians, and robbers, and murderers, and man-eaters, and ravenous wild beasts, where soldiers have to be sent to keep them from destroying each other, root and branch. I knew all about that country, ma’am, from hearsay, long ago,” replied the girl.

"And yet, knowing all this, or thinking that you know it, you wish to go out with me?" inquired the young lady, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, indeed, ma'am, I do, if you will please to take me. I have no friend left here now but you, and when you go I wish to go with you, if you will be so good as to take me, ma'am," said the girl, anxiously.

"But how about leaving your service at Hawke Hall?"

"Oh, ma'am, yes! Mrs. Curran, the housekeeper, who has the hiring of the housemaids, says she'll excuse me, and likewise recommend me willingly, which I know she will do, ma'am, especially as she wants to have her own niece in my place, as is but natural. That will be quite right, ma'am, if you will only please to take me," pleaded Lona.

"I would be very glad to have you, my dear girl; you may be sure of so much; for just consider what a happiness it will be to me in that far, foreign country to have a companion who has grown up with me from childhood; the only objection is your state of health."

"Oh, if you please, ma'am, Dr. Ellis was saying to me himself that a sea voyage would be the only thing to set me up, and if I could only get a place as maid with some lady going to the Indies, it would make a woman of me. And that was before I heard you were going abroad, ma'am."

"Were you so much indisposed as to require medical advice, my poor girl?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; it was when the doctor was called in to my stepmother that he happened to take notice of me and pull me over the coals for looking so badly."

"Yes, and, by the way, what have you been doing to yourself to make you so weak, Lona?"

"I don't know, dear ma'am, unless it is the trances," sighed the girl.

"The——" questioned the young lady in perplexity.

"The——"

"Trances; yes, ma'am, I am sure I grow weaker and weaker and weaker with every one I come out of."

"But what trances are you talking of? I never knew that you were subject to trances," said Miss Irvine, in still greater perplexity.

"No more I never was, ma'am, until Old Mother Crook down at Demondike put me into one."

"I do not comprehend. Mother Crook put you in a trance?"

"Yes, ma'am; and have put me into many a one since. Maybe you would not believe it, ma'am, but I am a clairvoyant," whispered the girl, with a mysterious look.

"A clairvoyant, Lona? What do you mean? How came you to be a clairvoyant?" inquired the wondering young lady.

"I don't know, ma'am, I'm sure. I never suspicioned myself to be one of them kind of folks until Old Mother Crook told me."

"How did she know, pray?" inquired the young lady, with an incredulous smile.

"She knowed it by my light complexion and light eyes and hair, so very light, she said; and she put me in a trance, and made me follow—follow—follow——"

"Follow whom, my girl?" demanded Miss Irvine, impatient of the speaker's awkward hesitation. "Follow whom?"

"A friend of her own," replied Lona Pond, as her white, wan face flushed with a delicate pink.

"That old person is an impostor. She ought to be sent to the workhouse," exclaimed Miss Irvine.

"I don't know, dear ma'am; but she does put me in these trances and makes me follow anyone she likes, if it is to the other end of the world, and tell her where they are and what they are doing. And when I come out of my trances I can't remember a thing of what I have seen or said, and I feel that confused in my mind and faint in my body as I am like to turn foolish or die."

"And you will become imbecile in mind and body if you continue such sinful and suicidal nonsense," said Isoline, with a feeling of indignation against Nan Crook.

"It is what I am beginning to fear, dear ma'am. There is no satisfaction to me in these trances and this clairvoyance if I cannot remember what I have seen, and come out of them as weak and silly as a newborn babe. And besides——" The girl dropped her voice and hesitated.

"Besides what, Lona?"

"I am getting to fear Old Mother Crook. She seems

to have a power over me, even when she is far away from me. Often I feel her drawing and drawing me, when I don't want to go to her. And often I feel like falling into a trance when she isn't anywhere near me," whispered the girl, with a shiver.

"Nonsense! Fancies! You shall go out to Australia with me, Lona. What you have just confided to me settles that point. It would be monstrous of me to leave the little companion and attendant of my childhood alone and helpless at the mercy of such a dangerous old charlatan. She would kill or craze you in a very short time. I am to be married this day week, Lona, and to leave with my husband for Portsmouth. Do you be ready to join me on that day, at the latest, and sooner if it be possible."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am! Thank you very humbly! You have made me so happy, if you please, ma'am. And my month will be up on the day after to-morrow, which will be Sunday, and I can come on Monday, ma'am, if that will suit," said Lona Pond, with an expression of genuine pleasure and gratitude on her fair, thin face, as she arose to depart.

"That will suit me perfectly, Lona. I am very glad that you are to go with me, child."

"I thank you, ma'am. Good-morning, ma'am."

And Lona Pond courtesied and left the room.

It was a subject for sincere congratulation from the young ladies of the castle when they were informed by the bride-elect that she had secured the services of her former maid to accompany her to Australia.

Letters from Lord Hawkewood to his wife and to his brother-in-law announced his speedy return to Castle Belle Isle.

Lady Hawkewood threw his lordship's letters to herself, unread, into the fire.

The young Duke of Grand Manors read the earl's letters to himself, and proclaimed their contents to the household.

Late in the week Lord Hawkewood reached Castle Belle Isle.

His lordship was warmly welcomed by all the family with the exception of the countess, who kept her room and sent down an excuse of indisposition; and in one sense of

the word, at least, the plea was a just one, for she was certainly not "disposed" to see the earl.

So, as the traveler had arrived just before dinner, the family dined without her ladyship.

The husband's repeated efforts to see his wife during the evening were a total failure.

So his lordship contented himself with the company of his relatives in the drawing-room.

He had heard of the approaching marriage of Lieut. Belle Isle and Miss Irvine, and he took the first proper opportunity of congratulating the young couple on their approaching happiness, at the same time begging the bride's acceptance of a beautiful set of rubies set in pearls, which he had found time to select for a wedding present as he passed through London on his way down to Cornwall.

Isoline frankly expressed her grateful appreciation of the offering, telling his lordship that they were not only her favorites of all jewels, but the first set of any sort that she had ever possessed.

Later, when the circle of friends separated for the night, the Earl of Hawkewood retired to the chambers he had occupied alone since his wife's illness.

But instead of going to bed he dismissed his valet, and seated himself before his writing-table and began a letter to the countess.

When he had finished, enveloped and sealed it, he laid it on the table, ready for delivery in the morning, saying:

"I think, if I know my lady, that must bring her to terms."

After which he undressed and went to bed.

The family were astir at the usual hour the next morning.

The earl, on leaving his chamber, took the letter in his hand to watch his opportunity of delivering it to the countess.

He could not trust it to a servant, because it bore rather a curious superscription, which was intended to enforce the attention of the countess, but must have excited comment if seen by anyone else.

He entered the breakfast room, where all the family were assembled with the exception of Lady Hawkewood.

In vain he waited for her until the morning meal was quite over.

Her ladyship did not appear.

Nor could he inquire for the countess. The young people present were presumed to be ignorant of the estrangement existing between the young married pair, which exiled the husband from the wife's apartments, and from any personal knowledge of her condition; and he did not wish to arouse their suspicions by asking questions.

But presently some one questioned him.

"What is the matter with Volante that she is not at breakfast this morning, Hawkewood?" bluntly inquired the young lieutenant.

"Her ladyship is indisposed," somewhat coldly replied the earl.

"Sorry to hear it; just as you have come home, too. Volly was well enough yesterday," blurted Cosmo.

Nobody answered him.

"Nothing serious, I hope, Hawkewood?" he persisted.

"Nothing serious, I believe," replied the earl, rising from the table.

His example was followed by the others.

"Come with me, Vicky, my dear—I wish to speak with you," he whispered to his young sister-in-law, as he drew her arm within his own and led her into the library.

Here he took a blank envelope from the table drawer, slipped his letter into it and put it in the hands of little Lady Victoria, saying:

"There, love! Run up to your sister and put this in her hands, and then run away again without saying a word. Do you understand?"

"No!" answered the girl, staring at her brother-in-law.

"It is a little joke. Now do you understand?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the little lady, although she certainly did not understand in the least; and she ran off to do her errand.

Lady Hawkewood was sitting in her easy-chair by the window of her boudoir, looking out over the terraced ground and the expanse of sea beyond.

She was carelessly wrapped in a dressing gown of soft black India silk, lightly trimmed with black crape, and

she wore upon her dark hair a little breakfast cap of white crepe lisse.

Beside her stood a satinwood stand, on which lay her solitary breakfast service of fine white Canton china and gold plate.

There came a light rap at the door, accompanied by the voice of Lady Victoria.

"May I come in, Volante?"

"Certainly," replied the countess.

"Oh! Have not you done breakfast?" inquired the girl, as she advanced into the room and saw the service still standing.

"Yes, I have quite finished. What is it, Victoria? Does Isola want——" began the countess, but her sister interrupted her.

"It is not about Isola. I was told to give you this," exclaimed the little lady.

And she laid the blank envelope down on the table and vanished.

"What does the child mean by such a freak?" murmured the countess, as she took up the blank envelope and drew the inclosure from it.

Recognizing the handwriting of the earl in the superscription, she frowned, and would have thrown the letter into the fire had not a few words attracted and fixed her attention, as the writer had intended they should.

These words were as follows: "IMPORTANT. A proposal for the adjustment of our difficulties is submitted within."

Lady Hawkewood now did what she had not done since the beginning of the estrangement between herself and the earl. She opened and read his letter—read it the more willingly that it was couched in the coldest, most formal and businesslike terms.

"CASTLE BELLE ISLE, Oct. 27, 18—.

"TO THE COUNTESS OF HAWKEWOOD—MADAM: Your sudden anger, long-continued resentment, and obstinate silence as to the cause of offense, have nearly discouraged me from seeking an explanation with you; but such an

explanation you must acknowledge to be absolutely necessary in view of the duties we owe to ourselves, our friends and the world.

"That you have, or that you believe you have, just cause of offense against me is evident.

"Of the true nature of this offense, real or fancied, I remain in total ignorance.

"Now, I ask you if there is common justice or humanity in condemning me unheard?

"If I had reason to suppose that I had been injured by any man or woman I should not bury the wrong in my own heart to embitter my own life and destroy my faith in human nature. I should consider such a cause unjust and cruel to the supposed wrongdoer. I should consider that he had the same right to know the nature of the charge against him, that he might defend himself, if he could do so, as the criminal, even the very worst criminal, has to an open trial and a full opportunity of defense.

"I claim from you, madam, only the right of a fair trial. I protest against being condemned unheard.

"Give me an interview, arraign me, and if I plead guilty, or should be proved guilty of any offense for which I should forfeit your esteem and confidence, I will submit to any penalty in the form of separation or divorce that you may please to adjudge.

"Pending your action, I remain, madam, your most obedient servant,
HAWKEWOOD."

The countess read this strange letter quite through. Then holding it in her hand, upon her lap, she mused upon it for some moments.

"The most reckless letter, under the circumstances, that I ever read!" she muttered to herself. "Does he not know why I will not associate with him any longer? Does not his conscience warn him? Does he pretend that he wants an explanation, because he believes that I will not have the courage to give one? Oh! I have but little courage for such a terrible ordeal!" she added, with a shudder; "but whether he really desires an interview with an explanation, or whether he only pretends that he does, in the belief that I am afraid to make one, and that he will in this manner place me at disadvantage—one thing is cer-

tain: he has uttered an unanswerable argument, given a convincing reason why I should not condemn him unheard; but give him the felon's privilege of defending himself! He cannot do it, of course! Neither could the wife poisoner, who was executed last week, but who had his trial all the same! Yes, Lord Hawkewood, you shall have your will! I will arraign you before me to answer for the murder of the late earl!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET OUT

THE countess arose and touched the bell.

She looked very pale and grim. Her naturally bright and beautiful face was blanched and fixed as in the stony rigidity of death.

Mrs. Greylock entered the room.

"Take away this breakfast service, and then go to the Earl of Hawkewood and say that I wish to see him here," said the lady, in a low tone and with an averted face.

The woman, made uneasy by the tone and manner of her mistress, looked up, but made no comment. With a—

"Yes, my lady," she withdrew.

The countess turned her easy-chair around until it stood with its back to the bay window. Then she seated herself in it, so that her face was in shadow. She had no intention of permitting the earl to discover the too evident signs of emotion in her countenance.

The door opened, and his lordship entered the chamber, bowed as if entering the presence of an honored acquaintance, and then took the chair that his wife indicated, immediately in front of her own, but a few feet from her.

The light from the bay window shone full upon his face, and revealed a pale, disturbed countenance. Neither of the two spoke for the first few moments, during which they gazed upon each other—she with a white, grim look, he with a pale and twitching one. She was the most profoundly affected; he the most agitated.

Yet he was the first to break the silence.

"You have sent for me—at last, madam," he said, in a low, monotonous tone.

"I have sent for you—at your request, my lord. You wanted an explanation," she replied.

"I wanted an explanation. Yes, madam."

"Upon what subject, my lord?"

"Can you ask? Can you doubt? Upon the subject of the sudden and strange offense you took against me nearly three months ago, and your persistent estrangement from me since."

"You want an explanation? You shall have it. Will you carry your memory back for fifteen months, to the night of the late Earl of Hawkewood's murder?" inquired the countess, in a low, stern tone, while she fixed her eyes upon his eyes, which fell under her gaze, while his pale face blanched to a more deadly pallor.

"No need. I have never for a moment forgotten that night," he answered, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"I should suppose not. You may also remember the sudden illness which struck me down and prevented my appearance at the coroner's inquest?"

"I remember."

"Even had I been well, I presume I should not have been called as a witness; for no one had the least reason to suppose that I could have thrown any light upon the mystery of that murder."

"Yes?" breathed the earl, in the same mechanical manner.

"For—attend to me, Lord Hawkewood!—I was, providentially, in the bachelors' corridor that night, when on my way from my bedchamber to the drawing room in search of a lost jewel—and again on my return from the drawing room to my bedchamber after having found the jewel," said the countess, speaking slowly and keeping her eyes fixed upon the face of the earl while she spoke.

"Well?" he gasped.

"I saw the earl alive and well, and heard him speak on dismissing the two accused men, Gow and Delaplaine, from his room that night. I know they left the earl alive and well, and went their way out of the castle. Therefore neither Gow nor Delaplaine were guilty of murdering the earl."

"No!" panted Lord Hawkewood.

"Now, who murdered the earl? Do you know, Lord Hawkewood?" she asked, fixing her eyes upon the man sitting opposite to her, as if she would read his soul.

His face flushed to the darkest crimson, and then blanched to marble. He did not reply.

"Your silence speaks more strongly than words could declare. You do know who murdered the late earl. And knowing that, you perfectly understand why I can never tolerate your presence again. Leave me now, Lord Hawkewood, and let all future intercourse between you and myself be made through solicitors," said the countess, in a hard, cold, stern voice.

Her words and manner seemed to rouse him and restore his self-possession. He started to his feet, exclaiming:

"You wrong me, Volante! Bitterly and cruelly wrong me! I thought—I feared—from your sudden and intense antipathy, that you suspected me of a crime too atrocious to be named; but the thought was too monstrous to be entertained! I dismissed it as an impossible theory! Yet it would seem to be too true! You do suspect me—me, your husband, of this heinous crime? You say——"

"I have not accused you, my lord! But 'a guilty conscience needs no accuser,' it is said," interrupted the countess, with a scornful look.

"You said that I knew who murdered the late Earl of Hawkewood!" he vehemently exclaimed.

"And do you not know?" she solemnly inquired.

"No! As the Lord is my judge, I do not!" earnestly replied the earl.

"What? You say that you do not know the assassin of the late earl?"

"As I hope to be saved, I do not!"

"Then I do," solemnly declared the countess.

"You?" faltered the earl, in a fainting voice.

"Yes, I!"

"How long since you have known this?"

"Since the night of our going home to Hawkewood Hall, on the first of last September! Since the hour of that night when I met you in the bachelors' corridor, and, recognizing you in the half light, fell into that deep swoon which

nearly ended my life!—which I wish had, indeed, ended my life!”

“Volante! I charge you in the name of justice—in the name of Heaven—to speak plainly, that I may know how to answer you!” urged the earl, in all the earnestness of innocence.

“I will speak plainly! To go back again to the night of the tragedy, fifteen months ago! I told you that on that night I saw the late earl dismiss Gow and Delaplaine from his room and shut the door after them.”

“You did.”

“That was while I was on my way down to the drawing room, about four o’clock in the morning. Are you listening?”

“With all my soul.”

“Two hours later, when, after a long search, I had found my lost jewel and was returning to my chamber, I passed through the bachelors’ corridor, and saw the real murderer of the late earl stealing from his room. I did not recognize the man as anyone I had ever seen previously. I did not know that he was an assassin fresh from the bedside of his victim. I only saw in the half light that it was a pallid man, in a dark dressing gown and a black cap with a gold tassel, and I only thought that he was some guest staying in the house, who had been taken sick in the night and had gone to the room of his host for assistance. That is what I saw and what I thought then. The next morning, when the murder was discovered, and I recalled the form of the man I had seen in the darkness before day, at the door of the murdered earl’s chamber, I felt sure that he was the assassin and that his pallor was the pallor of guilt and terror, not of illness. I should have given this testimony at the coroner’s inquest had I not been stricken almost unto death by the shock. When I was sufficiently convalescent to talk of the tragedy and learn that Gow and Delaplaine had been accused of the murder, knowing, as I knew, they were both free from that blood-guiltiness and that another man was the assassin, I sent for my father and for a magistrate and made an affidavit of what I had seen and heard in the bachelors’ corridor on the night of the murder. You surely must have heard of my deposition at the time, my lord,” said Lady Hawkewood icily.

"I did," replied the earl, who had somehow regained his self-possession and spoke in a calm tone.

"And now I come to the point," continued the countess, severely. "On the anniversary of that tragic night, you and myself had come home to Hawkewood Hall. The time, place, and association depressed me greatly. Being alone in my room toward midnight, I grew very nervous, and finally left my chamber and walked out to look for you. I passed through the bachelors' corridor. It was dark but for the moonlight that came through the oriel window at the end of the corridor. It looked as it had looked on that fatal night. As I went on I saw a man emerge from the room formerly occupied by the late earl. I nearly swooned with horror even then, for the man wore the same dark dressing gown, the same black cap with the gold tassel, and stood in the same light as the assassin, on that fatal night twelve months before."

"Well, well, well?" inquired the earl.

"I was then so transfixed with amazement and horror that I could not move. The picture was a reproduction, a facsimile, of the scene of the previous year. I was spell-bound to the spot while the man came toward me—came up to me. Oh! great Heaven! I recognized the murderer then, and I swooned—I would it had been unto death!" groaned the countess, dropping her convulsed face into her hands.

"Speak out!" exclaimed the earl, in a voice of desperation. "Charge me! Charge me distinctly! Tell me that in the midnight visitor to the bachelors' corridor on that fatal night of the tragedy you recognized me—your husband!"

"You know that I did!" replied the countess, in a hollow voice.

"You speak truly," said the earl, with a voice and manner strangely calm under the circumstances, and in contrast to his previous agitation. "You speak truly. It was I whom you saw coming from my cousin's chamber on the night of his murder. But, Volante, I swear by all that I hold sacred in life, and by all my hopes of salvation, that I am as guiltless as yourself of my poor cousin's death!"

Lady Hawkewood started and stared at him with the utmost intensity for a few breathless minutes, and then murmured, slowly:

"Is—it—possible? Can—this—be—true?"

"As the Lord in Heaven hears me speak, I utter truth when I repeat that I am guiltless of my cousin's death! I will swear it by any oath you may please to administer. But, oh, Heaven! that a husband should find it necessary to deny such a charge from his wife!" exclaimed the earl, in sudden bitterness of spirit that carried conviction of his sincerity to the mind of the countess.

Her fixed, white, stern face changed; her color came and went; she became deeply agitated.

"Since I have wronged you so extremely, I do most humbly beg your pardon, my lord. Yet I feel that that is not enough, though I do not know how to atone for so great a wrong," she muttered, in a broken and husky voice.

"Say no more about it, Volante. Let this kiss seal our reconciliation," said the earl, stooping and pressing his lips to hers.

And now her overwrought nerves gave way; she burst into tears and sobbed convulsively.

"Don't—don't! You will hurt yourself!" he pleaded, caressing and trying to soothe the excited and almost hysterical woman.

But in vain.

The countess had never really loved the earl. Her marriage with him had been merely a conventional union, entered into for the purpose of pleasing her parents and securing rank, wealth, and title, and a handsome establishment near her own family, upon whom her affections had now concentrated.

But he had loved her as much as he was capable of loving anyone, and so he had won some affection from her in the early weeks of their marriage, and this good feeling between the young pair had continued up to the time of her fancied discovery of his crime, from which date her whole being had revolted from him with such violence as nearly to overwhelm her own life or reason, as has been seen.

For months she had thought of him only with horror and detestation.

She had resolved to repudiate him at all cost of pride or position.

She had consented to receive his visit this morning only because she had understood that it was offered for the pur-

pose of making preliminary arrangements for a final and permanent separation.

In their interview she had been misled by his admissions up to the point of understanding that he actually confessed the crime of which she had accused him, and the guilt which she had been visiting upon his head for the last three months.

And now to be told and to be assured, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that he was innocent of the death of the late earl, and that she herself had bitterly wronged him by her false accusation.

This was too much for the nerves of Volante, whose sobs now shook her delicate frame as though they would have shaken it to dissolution.

"Dear Volante, why do you grieve so bitterly? One would be almost tempted to suspect that you are sorry to discover that it was not your husband who did that deed," whispered the earl.

"Oh, do not speak of it! I am overwhelmed with sorrow and shame!" she sobbed.

"Yet you have, at least, the consolation of knowing that your husband is guiltless of the crime which false appearances seemed to fix upon him."

"Yes, but how can you forgive me? How can I forgive myself? Oh, Lewis, you have a more generous nature than mine, else how could you condone such an offense as I have given you?" she wept.

"My dear wife, you did not willingly believe me guilty, did you?" he gently inquired.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried.

"Then how are you to blame? You were deceived by circumstances and you suffered in consequence even more than I did."

"Ah, Heaven only knows how intensely I suffered—almost to the wreck of my reason!"

"There is one lesson to be learned from this, my love—never to harbor a suspicion against a friend; but if any suspicion comes into your mind, have the sense of justice and the moral courage either to cast it out and trample it under foot, or to take it to that friend to be confirmed or destroyed. If you had breathed this suspicion to me—this suspicion that amounted to conviction—this suspicion

which has been consuming your life and destroying our happiness for three months past—I could have dissipated it at the beginning as easily as now.”

“Oh, how could I have spoken on such a subject to you? I should never have spoken of it if you had not drawn forth the words by force!” she sobbed.

“Then I, too, have been to blame. I should have compelled your confidence before this. Perhaps I would have done it had not your medical attendant forbidden me to disturb you upon any pretense,” he added.

Her sobs were subsiding. She was growing calmer.

He now ventured to ask her:

“Volante, though you entertained this terrible suspicion, you never imparted it to anyone?”

“I? Never! never! It oppressed my bosom—it suffocated me almost to death, but I would have died rather than have hinted the horror to any human being—even to my own mother! No one ever suspected the reason of my strange seizure, and hence they feared that my intellect was impaired,” said the countess earnestly.

“You exercised great courage and fortitude by such reticence under the circumstances, my dear.”

She did not reply to this observation; but in her turn she asked a question:

“Lewis, will you tell me, if you do not mind, what took you to your cousin’s room at that unusual hour, when your presence there has caused an almost fatal misapprehension?”

The earl flushed and paled, hesitated and trembled, but soon recovered his self-control, and answered:

“Of course, I do not mind telling you, dear. There should be no more reserve between us now. No, nor shall there be. I went to Horace’s room from the cause that you yourself divined when you first saw me at the door on the night of the tragedy—from the necessities of illness. I was taken ill in my chamber, with cramp in the chest, to which I am rather subject, as you have reason to know.”

“Yes.”

“Brandy, you are aware, always relieves me.”

“Yes.”

“But I had none at hand; nor did I know where to find the butler, or any servant who could get it for me.”

"No."

"But I knew that my cousin's room was only three doors below my own, in the same corridor. So I determined to go to him for relief. I thought it possible he might have brandy in his room, or at all events he would know where to get it. I went there——"

Here the earl paused and looked disturbed.

"I understand. How simple it all seems now that you explain it. Oh, I was insane ever to have suspected you, Lewis!"

"You were morbid, dear."

"But tell me, how did you find your cousin at that hour? It must have been very near morning when you went to his room. I know it was almost six o'clock when I saw you at the door—pale as death from your illness. If he was alive and well at that hour—as, of course, he must have been when you saw him—then the fatal deed must have been done after six o'clock."

The earl became very much agitated; his face blanched, his frame shook.

"Hush!" he whispered in a husky voice. "Horace was not 'alive and well' when I found him in his room that night!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the countess, with a half-suppressed cry.

"Volante, I did not wish to tell you this, but I see that I must do so. Can you be firm and composed while I relate what must harrow your soul?"

"Yes, yes, I can be strong and calm, now," replied the countess, making a great effort to control herself.

"Then I will tell you more of the secrets of that night than anyone except the assassin and his victim know of. When I left my bed and threw on my dressing gown to go to my cousin's room, I noticed the clock on the mantelpiece. The hands pointed to half-past five. As I passed along the corridor I noticed that all seemed very quiet there. Nothing was stirring. I soon reached my cousin's door and rapped, and waited; but there was no response. I rapped again, louder, and in doing so, I inadvertently pushed the door, and, to my surprise, it swung open, showing that it had not been locked nor even latched. I stepped over the threshold and called Horace, but I received no answer. In the mean-

time, my eyes growing accustomed to the obscurity, I saw that the furniture was in disorder, in much greater disorder than the retirement of the most reckless bachelor could explain. I went farther into the room, calling my cousin in a louder voice, until I reached his bedside—I was suffering so much that I did not hesitate to put my hand on him to wake him up, that he might procure me the relief I needed—I touched him—Oh, Volante——”

“You found him dead! You found him first! You!” gasped the countess.

“My hand came into contact with an ice cold, stiff face, and with a clammy, sticky substance, having the sickening scent of blood. I knew in an instant that my cousin was dead—murdered by some midnight assassin’s hand!”

“Go on! go on!” huskily exclaimed the countess.

“I have no recollection of how I left his room, or how I reached my chamber. A panic of horror had utterly paralyzed mind and body for the time being! My illness disappeared under it!”

“Why, in the name of Heaven, did you not give the alarm, rouse the household then and there? The murderers might have been caught. Even the wounded man might have been recovered and saved!” cried the countess, in great excitement.

“No! he was quite dead, cold and stiff; he could not have been recovered,” groaned the earl.

“But the assassin might have been apprehended. Why did you not raise the house?”

“I was rendered incapable of action for hours! When I had time to reflect, Volante, I saw that if I should give the alarm I might place my own life, honor, or liberty in deadly peril, without doing any good to anyone else. So I left the terrible tragedy to be discovered by the servants in the morning. My reasoning might have been false, my non-action timid; but remember that I was already unnerved by illness and agony and the shock of the horrible discovery completely disabled me.”

“But the next morning, or at the coroner’s inquest, why did not you tell what you had seen in the night?” urged the countess.

“Do you not understand how difficult or impossible that would have been for me to do? In the first place, while

my nerves were still in a shaken condition, I felt deeply humiliated by the memory of my weakness of the preceding night, and did not like to expose that weakness to the comments—perhaps to the contempt—of others. In the second place, by acknowledging my nocturnal visit to my cousin's chamber, and my discovery of the murder, which I had failed at the moment to reveal, I must have laid myself open to the darkest suspicions, if not to immediate arrest; for it is a maxim in law, that when a murder has been committed by an unknown hand, we are to look for the murderer among those who are to be most benefited by the death of the victim. Now, who was the party most to be benefited by the death of the earl? Myself, his heir and successor. My reflection upon these facts sealed my lips on the subject of my nocturnal adventure. Fortunately, no one had the slightest idea that I had anything to testify in regard to that night's tragedy, and so no one called me at the inquest. Nor, indeed, would my testimony, if given, have thrown the least light on the mystery. I had been the first to discover the murder—that was all."

As the earl finished speaking he attempted to take his wife's hand; but she withdrew it gently, saying, with a sigh:

"For all that, I wish you had roused the household when you first made the discovery."

CHAPTER VII

LOVERS AND HUSBANDS

AFTER all, the reconciliation between the husband and wife was but a superficial one.

She assented to every measure he proposed, but in a cool and indifferent manner. She agreed to return with him to Hawkewood Hall, to live in retirement, which her own physical condition, no less than the very recent decease of her parents, rendered necessary and proper—until the meeting of Parliament should summon the earl to London, when, if all should be well with her, they would go for the season to their town house in Piccadilly.

Outwardly the countess was civil and even kind to the earl. But inwardly she was still full of distrust and uneasiness.

Within the last three months she had gone through an experience that might have unsettled the intellect of a much stronger-minded woman than Volante, Lady Hawke-wood.

She had discovered what appeared to her to be positive proof that her husband had been the assassin of his cousin and predecessor, the late earl, and simultaneously with this discovery she had inevitably taken a horrible antipathy to him, and with the terrible secret in her heart she had withdrawn herself from his society, without giving any reason for doing so.

In truth, she could not have explained her conduct; it was awful to think of, it was impossible to speak of, the atrocious crime of which she had been led to believe him guilty.

The suppressed anguish of this secret must finally have killed or crazed the countess, had she not, in a moment of exasperation, been goaded into "arraigning" the earl, at her own tribunal, and charging him with the murder.

To her utter amazement, he had completely vindicated himself from the charge.

But all the relief the countess would otherwise have felt in his vindication was destroyed by the great passion of shame and sorrow into which she fell on finding out how deeply, cruelly, unpardonably she had wronged him by that atrocious suspicion!

So deep was her penitence and humility that she would have atoned for her fault by any means in her power.

The earl had gone to his cousin's room on the night of the murder to procure something to relieve his pain in an acute attack of illness. And she, having seen him at the door of the victim's chamber, looking pale and agitated, had suspected him of the murder! Did ever wife so deeply, so madly wrong her husband? What could she do to atone for so heavy an injury?

These were the painful thoughts that filled the mind of the countess and prevented her from feeling the unalloyed pleasure she would otherwise have enjoyed in the knowledge of the earl's innocence.

But there came a reaction from this state. When, in the course of his narrative of that fatal night's proceedings, Lord Hawkewood made the startling revelation that he, himself, had first discovered the murder, and discovered it several hours before it was known to anyone else in the house, and yet had not given the alarm at the time, nor even made any disclosure at the coroner's inquest, the countess' disturbed mind was invaded by new causes of doubt and perplexity.

Why, in the name of justice and mercy, had he not roused the household immediately upon the discovery of the murder, as any other man, woman, or child would have done, under the circumstances?

He ascribed his inaction on that occasion to the paralyzing effects of illness and horror.

But the earl, as she knew, was no coward. Why, then, had he suffered himself to be overcome either by pain or panic at such a time?

What had been in his heart?

What was on his conscience?

She put these questions from her mind. She had bitterly wronged him once. She would not do so again by the faintest thought. She put these questions from her.

But they returned again, enforced by others that arose.

The earl had acted in what seemed to be the most magnanimous spirit toward his offending wife. He had freely pardoned the deep wrong she had done him by her dreadful suspicions.

Now, how could a man whose conscience was "void of guilt" have so easily condoned such an offense?

Why should he have done so?

What was on his conscience?

Not actual crime. That she did not now believe.

But intention?

She could not drive these questions away. They would return. But she was resolved she would not act upon them. They would not govern her conduct.

Since her husband was proved to have been entirely guiltless of his cousin's death, she would do all she could to atone for the grievous injury she had done by suspecting him of that crime.

So she agreed to every measure he proposed, and, as a

preliminary step, she began to make preparations for their return to Hawkewood Hall, which was to take place immediately after the marriage of Cosmo Belle Isle and Isoline Irvine.

Lord Hawkewood really seemed to rejoice in his reconciliation with his wife, and sought to please her in every way. It was from him that the proposal came that Lady Victoria Belle Isle should accompany the countess to Hawkewood Hall, and remain there as her sister's guest and companion as long as should be mutually agreeable to them.

This plan seemed really so good and wise an arrangement for all parties that it was promptly adopted.

The wedding day dawned—as lovely a day as ever formed an exception at an unlovely season in an unlovely climate.

At a very early hour the household of Castle Belle Isle was astir.

The ladies and gentlemen of the family—all young people now, it will be remembered—breakfasted together, as upon any other day, and then began to prepare for the ceremony.

In honor of the memory of the late duke and duchess the marriage was to be a strictly private one—none but the nearest relatives were to be present as witnesses—but the family mourning was to be modified for that occasion only.

The bride was to be attired in her traveling suit of dark-gray poplin, and the young bridesmaids were to be dressed in dark-gray silks with black trimmings.

There was not even to be a wedding breakfast, for the ceremony was to be quietly performed at the parish church at Hawkeville, and at its conclusion the newly married pair were to drive directly to the railway station and take the train for Portsmouth, where the lieutenant's regiment was getting ready for embarkation.

Isoline was up as early as were any of her companions.

Mrs. Greylock, the oldest lady's maid in the castle, was soon in attendance.

She was ordered to dress the bride, a duty as agreeable to her in her sixtieth year as ever it could have been to a bridesmaid of sixteen.

The wedding dress—a traveling suit of dark-gray Irish poplin, had been selected by Lady Hawkewood as a color and style peculiarly becoming to the rich brunette beauty

of the bride—lay spread over a large chair. A gray cloth sacque, trimmed with silver-fox fur, and a gray felt hat, with a silver-gray marabout tuft, and a pair of dainty white kid gloves—to be exchanged after the ceremony for gray ones, for the journey—lay upon the bed.

Isoline was seated on a low chair before the tall dressing glass, submitting her beautiful head to the tender mercies of Mrs. Greylock, who, in addition to her other high qualifications of a lady's maid, possessed "eminent" talent for hairdressing.

She was engaged in "frizzing" the front locks in the most approved style, a la Skye terrier, when the door was opened by the housekeeper, who quietly admitted a young woman and withdrew.

The newcomer was Lona Pond, who, in honor of her mistress' marriage, had, for once, exchanged her black bombazine dress for a gray cashmere suit.

"We are all the color of a rainy day," muttered Mrs. Greylock, disapprovingly, as she glanced at the girl's costume.

Lona Pond did not heed, or hear, but went quickly up to her mistress and courtesied.

"You are punctual, Lona. But are you quite sure that you are willing to leave country and friends to go with me to the other end of the world? If you have any regrets, child, there is still time to withdraw," said Miss Irvine.

"I have no friends in this country, ma'am. I leave a few acquaintances, to go with my only friend and dear mistress. I hope you are satisfied to take me, ma'am," respectfully answered the girl.

"I am more than satisfied. I am very glad to have you, since you are so willing to go with me. It will be a great comfort to me, Lona, to have the little attendant of my childhood with me in that distant land, where all are strangers," said the young lady, with frank kindness.

"And, indeed, I will study to do my duty by you, ma'am, as faithfully now as ever I did in the old time," said Lona.

"Well, then," put in Mrs. Greylock, with the freedom of an esteemed old servant, "you had better stop talking and begin doing. You could make yourself useful and save time now by putting on your young lady's shoes and stock-

ings. There they are, rolled up in that tissue paper on the foot of the bed," said Mrs. Greylock shortly.

Lona instantly obeyed, got the parcels and knelt down at the feet of her mistress and began to change the little velvet slippers for the fine white silk hose and the soft black kid boots.

With two pairs of hands at work on her, the little bride was soon dressed, even to the last item, the long, silver-gray scarf veil of fine gauze that was tied around her hat and draped about her sacque.

"Now, stand up, dear ma'am, and view the effect," said the well-satisfied lady's maid, when her task was finished.

Isoline stood up before the tall glass in which her form at full length was seen.

The mirror—in its time—had reflected more magnificent brides of the house of Belle Isle, in all the splendor of trained white satin and velvet dresses, point-lace veils, orange-flower wreaths, and diamond jewelry, but never had it reflected a more beautiful bride than Isoline Irvine in her pretty, simple costume of shaded gray.

"A quiet little partridge after the swans," muttered Mrs. Greylock, appreciatively, while mentally contrasting the present with the past.

"Now, my dear, how do you like yourself?" she inquired of the young lady.

"I like your work very much, Mrs. Greylock, thank you," replied Miss Irvine.

"I am happy you do, my dear. Now sit down and rest until you are called for. Take all the rest you can, for you will have a tiresome day of it," continued Mrs. Greylock, as she gently put the bride back into her chair.

Miss Irvine smiled, reached for a parcel that lay unopened on the dressing table, and placed it in the hands of the woman, saying:

"Here, Mrs. Greylock, is a keepsake that I wish to leave with you.

"Oh, thank you so much for thinking of me, ma'am," replied the woman, with a courtesy, as she began to unwrap the parcel.

It contained a handsomely bound prayer book in large, clear print; and also a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles in a fine morocco case.

"Nothing could be handsomer or more suitable or valuable to me than these, and I will use them every day, and keep them as long as I live, in memory of you, dear ma'am," she continued, raising the gloved hand of the young lady to her lips.

"I am glad they please you, Mrs. Greylock," replied Isoline.

"And, now, Pond," said the woman, turning to the younger maid—she would never have lowered her own sense of dignity by calling the girl by her pet name of Lona, or even her fine name of Leonora—"now, Pond, do you go and find out if the young ladies are all ready. They may be waiting for us. Let them know that our bride is dressed."

"Yes, ma'am," said the meek little maid, as she left the room to obey.

A few minutes elapsed, and a flutter of light footsteps was heard along the corridor, and Lady Victoria Belle Isle and her younger sisters and little brothers came into the room.

"We are all ready and waiting, dear, and the little ones are to go with us to the church. John and Volly and Hawkewood have decided that it shall be so. They are to go in the break, with Flowers to look after them. And they are delighted, of course," said her little ladyship, as she threw her arms around her friend and kissed her repeatedly.

"Please be careful, my lady. Please do not disarrange Miss Irvine's veil. Careless as it looks, every fold has been studied by me," pleaded Mrs. Greylock.

Lady Victoria laughed, and desisted from her ardent demonstrations, declaring that she would not for the sake of any mere personal gratification of affection risk marring the effect of Mrs. Greylock's artistic work.

"I am very glad that the children are to go with us. It will defer the parting for some hours longer," said Isoline, as she kissed them one after the other.

"Yes; they will all be men and women by the time you come back—if you ever come back! Even Baby Lotty will be a dignified *materfamilias*."

"See me sash!" said the little mite, finding attention directed to herself, and pointing to the broad black ribbon tied around the waist of her white frock.

Isoline took the child up to her lap and kissed her, with tears.

"I beg you will not do that, ma'am. Please stand up and let me rearrange your dress again before you go," said Mrs. Greylock, with a look of dissatisfaction at the young lady's carelessness.

Isoline complied, and when her dress was smoothed she turned to Lady Victoria, who said, in answer to her look:

"Yes, of course, if you are ready. We will go down at once. They are waiting for us."

"Good-by, Mrs. Greylock," said Isoline, who never forgot to be kind to the humblest of her attendants.

"Good-by; and may the Lord bless you, and prosper you in your new home, ma'am," said the woman, courtesying, and taking the hand that was offered to her.

Isoline thanked her with a smile, and went out, casting one loving look over the room in which she had lived so long, and which she would not see again for years, and might not see again forever. The impending sadness of separation was already beginning to cloud the sunshine of her bridal joy.

At the foot of the grand staircase the young ladies were met by the gentlemen.

The Earl of Hawkewood drew Miss Irvine's arm within his own, and led her out, saying:

"You and Lady Victoria are to go in the carriage with the countess and myself. We are to be your church parents on this occasion."

He placed her in the barouche beside Lady Hawkewood on the back seat, and then handed Lady Victoria Belle Isle on the third seat, and took the fourth himself.

The bridegroom, with the young Duke of Grand Manors and the Lords Cuthbert and Albert Belle Isle, filled the second carriage.

The young children, five in all, filled the capacious "break," under the charge of the nursery governess, Miss Flowers.

There were no bells, no flowers, no wedding favors, no gathering of the household servants or agricultural laborers, no circumstance to distinguish this little bridal procession from an ordinary drive to the ferry.

Though the news of the approaching marriage had gone abroad, it was well understood, both on the estate and in the village, that any demonstration on the part of the tenantry or villagers would be considered improper under the circumstances of the recent decease of the late Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors.

They drove on quietly to the ferry, crossed on the great flat boat, and drove through the village directly to the church.

It might have been Lady Godiva's ride, for any crowd of spectators that could be seen.

In the churchyard, however, there was about a score of idlers, among whom were the inevitable three—the ubiquitous Penn, Tree, and Proddy.

The church doors had been locked to keep out the curious crowd; but they were now opened to admit the bridal party.

The procession formed in the vestibule, and marched up the middle aisle.

The Earl of Hawkewood, with the bride on his arm, led the way.

The bridegroom, escorting the Countess of Hawkewood, followed.

The young Duke of Grand Manors, with Lady Victoria Belle Isle, came third.

Lord Cuthbert and Lady Beatrice were the fourth couple.

Lord Albert and Lady Maude the fifth.

The two children, the little Ladies Eleanor and Charlotte, were the sixth.

On reaching the chancel the procession broke.

Lord Hawkewood led the bride to the altar railings, where she kneeled upon the cushions.

The bridegroom, with a bow, dropped Lady Hawkewood's arm and knelt down on the right of his bride.

Behind her stood Lady Victoria Belle Isle as bridesmaid.

Behind him the young Duke of Grand Manors as best man.

The Earl of Hawkewood, as "church father," stood near the bride.

Around these central figures were grouped the other members of the party.

The Rev. Dr. Vincent, in full canonicals, stood, book in hand, in front of the reading desk.

On his right, the Rev. Mr. Traverse, the Bermondsey curate, who happened to be on a visit to the neighborhood.

On his left, the parish clerk, Peter Carr, who was so great in responses that he was apt to roll them forth out of place, even in the marriage ceremony.

The rites began with the usual solemn exhortation and prayer, and proceeded in the usual way.

During its progress a few people were observed to steal quietly into the church and scatter themselves among the empty pews.

One slender, graceful woman in deep mourning noiselessly entered a corner pew in the angle of the church on the left of the altar, where she, being in the deepest shade, could yet have a clear view of the bridal pair, from whom, by the position of her head, she never seemed to remove her gaze—though, as her thick black crape veil was down, nothing could be distinctly seen of her face.

When the ceremony was concluded with the solemn words:

"I pronounce you man and wife. Those whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder,"—the bridegroom and the bride arose from their knees and received the congratulations of their friends.

Then the rector led the way to the vestry, and entered it by the door that opened on the left of the chancel.

The bridal party followed to register the marriage.

In passing on, Isoline went close beside the corner pew in which the solitary woman in mourning sat in the shade.

The latter left her seat and came closer to the passing bride, gazed at her for a moment through the thick folds of her black crape veil, and then opened the pew door and came out and mingled with the people who were leaving the church.

This incident passed so swiftly and silently that no one noticed it except the bride.

But the effect of the encounter upon her was startling. For a moment she stopped short, as if suddenly stricken with paralysis.

Then, with a spasmodic clutch, she seized the bridegroom's arm.

He looked down on her pale face and trembling frame and smiled on her, as he drew her closer to him and led her on, for he naturally enough ascribed her agitation to the influence of her present position and circumstances.

They entered the vestry, where the parish register lay open on the table.

They gathered around it to record the marriage.

Then, for the first time, the deadly emotion of the bride was noticed, and commented upon by her friends.

Isoline had not been agitated during the progress of the marriage ceremony, they remarked. What, then, could have so deeply disturbed her since its conclusion?

Meantime, the parish clerk, Carr, dipped a pen in ink, and placed it in the hands of the bridegroom, and pointed to the place in the register where he was required to sign his name.

Cosmo Belle Isle withdrew himself from Isoline's side and bent over the book to write.

Then Lady Hawkewood glided softly up to Isoline and inquired:

"What is troubling you, dear girl?"

The bride started slightly, hesitated, and then answered in a low, expiring voice:

"Oh, Lady Hawkewood, I have seen it again!"

"Seen what, dearest?" whispered the countess.

"My mother's face! My dead mother's living face!"

"Folly, dear child! Where do you think you have seen it?"

"Here, in the church! In the corner pew! Did you see a lady in deep mourning sitting there?"

"I do not remember. I did not notice. I think not."

"So I supposed. No one was likely to see her but me, her daughter, to whom she has appeared now for the third time!" muttered the bride, in a trembling voice, and with an ashen cheek.

"Nonsense, my dear Isoline! I really thought you were superior to such superstition. This woman in mourning, whom you saw in the corner pew, in that obscure light, was a substantial person who probably bears some likeness to your beloved mother, and must be the same whom you have

twice before seen. We will have her looked up, and I will write to you from Hawkewood Hall, and tell you all about her. Do not be frightened at your own imaginings!"

"Mrs. Belle Isle, your signature is wanted here," said Dr. Vincent politely.

And Isoline, pale and trembling, went up to the table and signed her name to the register.

Those who witnessed her agitation ascribed it to the natural nervousness of a bride, but thought it excessive, even for that cause.

The witnesses now added their signatures to the record, and the whole party, after taking leave of the clergymen, filed out of the vestry and returned to their carriages to drive to the railway station.

There was the usual change that takes place in the program after the marriage ceremony.

The bridegroom handed the bride into his own carriage.

The Earl and Countess of Hawkewood, the Duke of Grand Manors, and Lady Victoria Belle Isle, occupied the second carriage, and all the other members of the party crowded themselves into the capacious break, and so the three vehicles proceeded to the railway station.

Here the final adieux were to be made.

But they were just half a minute too late. The train had started, and was steaming out of sight as their carriages drew up in front of the building.

They had, therefore, an hour to wait for the next one.

They all went into the ladies' parlor, which, at this time, was quite deserted, as it was apt to be after the departure of a train.

For a way station, the room was very well furnished and very clean.

Our party drew seats together and sat down, not so much disappointed as most people are at having missed their train. They were not ill-pleased to be reprieved from separation and to have one more precious hour of each other's company before parting for so long and so indefinite a time.

This last hour was filled with last words.

While they sat thus together, Lona Pond came in from the second-class waiting room and informed her mistress that she had arrived in the van with the luggage from

Castle Belle Isle in time for the first train, and had gone into the second-class waiting room, not knowing by which class her mistress would wish to travel. When she saw the carriages arrive she came into the first-class waiting room to report to her mistress.

"Quite right, Lona. You are to go in the same carriage with us," said Mrs. Belle Isle.

"Who is looking after that luggage?" inquired Lieut. Belle Isle, rising to leave the room.

"Stop here, Cosmo. It is all right. I ordered Stepney to attend to it," said Lord Hawkewood.

The young lieutenant bowed his thanks and sank into his seat.

The Duke of Grand Manors, who had lingered outside to buy a copy of that morning's *Times*, which had just come down from London, and was for sale on the news counter, now came in with the paper in his hand, exclaiming:

"Oh, I say, Belle Isle, do you know the honors in store for you?"

"I do not know what you mean. I know the honors I enjoy," replied the bridegroom, with a fond, proud look at his new bride.

"Oh, yes, of course. But do you know who you are going to take out in your ship?"

"Our regiment is going. I don't know any others."

"Well, then, listen to this—the whole of it," said the duke. And he read as follows:

"MATRIMONIAL AND OFFICIAL.—The marriage of Belmont, Viscount Seyres, with Mary, daughter of the late Rev. James Smith, and grand-niece and heiress of the late Maria, Princess Zavieski, is fixed for the 28th instant.

"The viscount has been recently appointed Governor of Tasmania, and will sail, with his bride and their suit, on the *Australasian*, which leaves Portsmouth on the first of December, proximo. The cabins of the government ship have been fitted up in elegant style for the accommodation of the new governor and his party."

"There! what do you think of that? Why, Cosmo, you and Mrs. Belle Isle will not only have the honor of the governor's company, but the delight of the woman's, who,

by refraining from matrimony during the life of her aunt, deprived yourself of the inheritance of the largest private fortune in the British empire. Now then!"

All the company were struck dumb with amazement except Lieut. Belle Isle, who laughed and said:

"I am glad they are going in our ship. I have some curiosity to see the beautiful woman who could withstand all overtures to matrimony until she had secured this immense fortune, and then in her mature age take up with an old nobleman of feeble health and impecunious condition! As for the fortune, as far as I am concerned, I am willing she should have it. I have all the wealth I covet in this world," he added, taking the hand of his bride and pressing it to his lips.

The warning whistle of a coming train was heard, and the voice of the porter arose, crying out:

"Passengers for Portsmouth!"

Our party arose in haste. Trains do not wait for tender, lingering adieux. Steam has no sentiment of its own, and no consideration for other people's.

Hasty, earnest good-bys were exchanged. Children were kissed in such a hurry that the salute was more like an assault than a caress.

And almost before the little bride could collect her scattered faculties she found herself seated in a first-class railway carriage, with her husband beside her, and her maid before her, being whirled onward at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE DEAD ALIVE"

THERE was no one else in the compartment, and the bridegroom would gladly have dispensed with the company of the lady's maid, so that he might have enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* journey with his bride. But by no word or look did he express this feeling. He was much too refined and amiable to criticise any arrangement made by her.

By some fine sympathy she discovered his hidden annoyance, and bending toward him, said in a low tone:

"I have Lona Pond in here with us, because whatever she may be in years, she is but a child in intellect, and not to be trusted to travel alone in a second-class carriage. You do not mind, dear, do you?"

"Oh, no, not at all," returned Cosmo, who thereupon resolved that he would "not mind" any arrangement his "angel" might be pleased to make on that happy day.

Lona Pond had not heard one word of the conversation of which she had been the subject.

Instinctively feeling that she was an intruder upon a bridal *tête-à-tête*, notwithstanding that she was there by her mistress' direction, the girl had seated herself as far away from the newly married pair as the limited dimensions of the compartment would permit, had shrunk into her corner, made herself as small and insignificant as possible, and persistently looked out of the little window beside her on the expanse of the sea, beside which the railroad ran for many a mile.

It was a short, swift, and uneventful journey.

After a ride of five hours the party arrived about dusk at Portsmouth, where Mr. Belle Isle engaged rooms at the Fountain Hotel.

It wanted a week now to the time of embarkation.

The day succeeding their arrival the lieutenant went to report at the headquarters of his regiment.

After which all the time, when he was not on duty at the barracks, he devoted to his bride.

He took her out walking, riding, or driving every morning to see all that was interesting in the town and its environs, and every evening to some place of amusement; all of which was very novel and delightful to the country-bred girl.

The ladies of the regiment—on whom she was to depend for society in that far-off, barbarous country, for so many years to come—all called on her, and when they did not find her in—which happened very frequently, as she was abroad so much—they left cards and kind messages.

She exchanged frequent letters with Lady Hawkewood and Lady Victoria Belle Isle, both of whom were then at Hawkewood Hall.

But she got no satisfactory news in regard to the strange woman in mourning who had frightened her so

much. Such a woman—if she had ever existed in the flesh—had never been seen in the village or its vicinity.

All this walking, riding, driving, sight-seeing, letter writing, and receiving and paying visits, filled up every hour of every day and caused the week to pass rapidly away.

On the last day before the sailing of the ship Mr. Belle Isle took his bride down on board the *Australasian*.

The simple country girl had never before in her life seen a great ship, except at a distance, and she was filled with wonder and delight at the vastness of hulk, decks, masts, sails, and all its paraphernalia of seamanship, and with the snugness and comfort of its accommodations for passengers.

She was favored with a sight of the cabin and state-rooms that had been fitted up for the exclusive use of the new governor and his party, and which in its elegance and luxury, all on a small scale, reminded her of a miniature suite of palatial apartments.

Finally she saw her own little stateroom in the fore cabin, cramped, close, but clean.

"Well, Cosmo, this grand *Australasian* is, after all, the finest sight I have ever seen in Portsmouth or Portsmouth harbor," she said, with enthusiasm, as they were leaving the ship.

"Well, you will have a very good opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with the great creature. You will be in her company for the next four months, at least. How do you think you will like that?" laughed the lieutenant.

"I shall like it very much, indeed."

"I hope you will not be seasick."

"I hope not! Pray do not suggest such a thing!" laughed Isoline.

The next day—the day of the embarkation of the regiment and the sailing of the ship—was a gala day in the town.

Early in the morning, Lieut. Belle Isle took his wife and her maid on board the *Australasian*, saw them safe in their quarters and left them there to return to his duty in the barracks.

The other ladies of the regiment were also on board.

At noon that day the regiment, in full dress uniform,

marched from their barracks to the ship with flying flags and beating drums, and all the town turned out to see them.

An hour after the governor and his suit came on board, and were received by the soldiers and marines under arms and a salute of artillery.

The ladies in the fore cabin crowded up the companion way to see the new governor and his bride, as they passed down the deck between the presented arms of the soldiers and marines.

They saw that he was a fine, handsome, old man, with classic features, a fresh complexion, piercing blue eyes, under heavy eyebrows that heightened their luster, and iron-gray hair and mustache.

"Why, he is a splendid old gentleman!" whispered the surgeon's wife. "He does not look sickly at all! They said he was infirm! We might have known that was not true, for if it had been, he never would have been appointed governor of Tasmania!"

The other ladies agreed with her in her opinions of the viscount.

But of his new wife they were not so well able to judge. They saw a tall, slight, elegantly formed woman, hanging on his arm. She wore a fine navy-blue cloth suit, trimmed deeply with silver-fox fur, a black felt hat and feather, and a navy-blue gauze veil that covered her face, and neat black gloves, and carried a rich cashmere shawl on her arm.

She passed by, on her husband's arm, without any of the ladies having got a glimpse of her face.

But why did Isoline Belle Isle start and shiver, and put her hand to her heart, and mutter under her breath:

"Am I going mad? Great Heaven, am I going mad? Why do I see my dead mother's living form under every disguise? Her living face shadowed forth under that dark veil? Mad! Yes, I fear—I fear—that I am going mad indeed!"

She followed the ladies down into the cabin and entered the little stateroom that had been appropriated to her use, and where she found her maid engaged in unpacking valises and dressing cases, and "putting things to rights," as she expressed it.

"Lona, did you see the new governor's lady as she

passed?" she inquired, as she sat down on the short sofa opposite her berth.

"No, ma'am, I did not. I was at the foot of the ladder, and only got a glimpse of her balmoral boots and blue skirts," answered the girl, looking up from the bag she was unpacking.

Isoline dropped her head upon her hand and sank into deep thought.

She could do nothing else. She could not settle herself to any occupation.

By the bustle overhead she knew that the ship was getting under way.

Soon she heard the signal gun fired, and she knew the ship was off.

She felt the vast hulk, upon which she herself was but an insignificant little speck, swing heavily, heavily round and head for the open sea.

She heard the voices of her companions, as they passed by her stateroom door, talking of going up on deck to see the last of the "old country."

She felt a desire to join them and look once more upon the receding shores of England, which she might never see again.

She went out and silently slipped her arm through that of the surgeon's wife and ascended with her to the upper deck.

The deck was not crowded, as it might have been supposed to be at the hour of sailing.

The soldiers, sailors, and marines were all at their quarters or posts of duty. Their officers were with them.

On deck, therefore, only remained the man at the wheel, the officer of the watch, and the ladies of the regiment who had just come up.

The ship was bearing swiftly out to sea with the tide, under full sail, before a stiff breeze.

The shore was already receding.

Leaving her companion, Isoline went and leaned over the bulwarks, and fixed her eyes upon the fading land, determined to see the last of it.

She gazed like one in a dream, until she was suddenly awakened by a thrill that shook her whole frame.

The governor and his wife had passed close behind her, brushing her raiment with their own as they went.

She turned and watched their progress.

The governor led the lady toward the stern of the ship, took a camp stool from a servant, who followed him, arranged a seat and covered it with a rug, and placed his wife upon it, carefully wrapping her in her Indian shawl, and then, after a few words, left her there and went to join some officers who had come up on the quarter-deck.

The lady, who had kept her veil down as she walked the deck, now raised it, that she might look out toward the west, where the sun was sinking into the ocean, and kindling sea and sky into a crimson flame.

Her face was turned from Isoline, who, with lips apart and dilated eyes, was staring at her form.

Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized the girl and controlled her. She arose slowly and steadily, and with her eyes still fixed on the governor's lady, moved like one walking in sleep up to the object of her interest.

The lady turned.

The girl stood still.

Their eyes met in one long, fixed stare of amazement, and then both spoke:

"Isoline!"

"Mother!"

"My child! my child! how came you here?"

"Mother! Mother! Mother!"

CHAPTER IX

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

WITH that agonized cry of strangely mingled terror, joy, and amazement, Isoline sank down at her mother's feet and dropped her head in her mother's lap.

Yet she was not so utterly overcome by the shock of this discovery as might have been anticipated. Perhaps the "apparition" that had startled her on three several occasions had also secretly prepared her for this most strange *dénouement*.

There was a silence so deep that they might have heard each other's hearts beating, and then the elder lady spoke in a voice full of tears.

Bending down over the kneeling girl, she put her arms around the bowed shoulders and laid her face upon the sunken head until her lips touched the soft, dark hair, and said, in a voice broken by suppressed sobs:

"Isoline! Isoline! I thank Heaven for this meeting, even though it may bring me ruin, dishonor, and death."

"Mother," murmured the girl, in a faint tone, and she could say no more.

"Oh, how my heart has hungered—has famished for you, my child! I never knew how deeply I loved you until I had left you."

"Oh, mother, mother, what made you leave me?" gasped the girl, in a half-suppressed sob.

"Necessity," breathed the lady, with a deep sigh.

"And what necessity should part the widowed mother and her only child?" whispered Isoline.

"I cannot tell you now, or here, where we are liable to be overheard or interrupted every instant," murmured the lady.

"But you married the Viscount Seyres, the new governor of Tasmania. How came you to do that, mamma? We read in the papers that he was to marry Miss Smith, the millionaire heiress of the late Princess Zavieski. This was no mere newspaper rumor, mamma. It was known to be a fact! How came it about that you married him at the last moment instead of Miss Smith?"

While Isoline spoke her mother became extremely agitated. Her voice was shaken by emotion as she answered:

"I can explain nothing now and here—as I told you—and for the reasons I told you."

Isoline involuntarily lifted up her head and withdrew from her mother's embrace, and seated herself on a coil of ropes.

She was scarcely responsible for her own action, which was instinctive, and was inspired by a subtle moral repulsion of which she was scarcely conscious.

But the erring woman before her keenly felt and understood the movement, and was deeply wounded and humiliated by it.

"Oh, my child, my child, you do not understand! But I will explain. I will tell you all. Hear before you judge, Isoline!" she cried, clasping her hands in a desperation of appeal which the girl, in her imperfect knowledge of the circumstances, could in no wise comprehend, and which, instead of reassuring her mind, filled it with darker doubts.

She looked up to her mother's face with an expression full of distress.

"Hear me before you judge me, my daughter! 'Strike, but hear!'" said the lady, with a half-suppressed cry of anguish. "'Strike, but hear!'"

As if the gentle Isoline could have stricken her mother either literally or metaphorically.

"Mamma!" she murmured, in a voice full of wonder and pity.

"Hush!" said the lady, in a low, frightened tone that caused her daughter to turn her head and to see the Viscount Seyres slowly walking toward them.

Isoline arose from her lowly seat upon the ropes and stood by her mother's chair.

As the viscount came up, the lady's face and manner underwent a complete change. Resuming all her self-control and speaking in a voice of forced calmness, she said, presenting the viscount to her companion:

"I am happy to meet you, madam—the wife of Lieut. Belle Isle, of the ——th Regiment, of course. I must congratulate my lady on her charming acquisition for the voyage," said his lordship, with a deep bow and with a cordial, pleasant smile.

Isoline, trembling excessively, bent her head in acknowledgment of his words, then timidly raised her soft, dark eyes to her stepfather's face—her stepfather! How strange the idea to one who had never even known a father! Her stepfather, who was all unconscious of the relationship between them!

She saw standing before her a tall, portly, martial-looking man of some sixty years of age, with iron-gray hair crowning a noble head, with a clear forehead, bushy, iron-gray eyebrows overhanging keen, bright-blue eyes, an aquiline nose, an iron-gray mustache shading a well-formed mouth and a smooth chin; in a word, a countenance from

which beamed the truth and goodness which drew all around him who were not essentially evil into a sphere of peace.

He saw her disturbance, and, attributing it only to the bashfulness of a young bride, he smiled on her, and as he smiled his keen, bright-blue eyes softened into tenderness.

Isoline felt her heart drawn out to love and trust him.

"Mrs. Belle Isle is a dear little love of mine, whom I have known ever since she was a baby. And now I think I must carry her off to my cabin to have a *tête-à-tête*. We have so much to talk of since we saw each other last," said Isoline's mother, with a composure that filled the girl with wonder.

"What does mamma mean by all this?" she asked herself. "Why does she not introduce me as her daughter to my stepfather now? She will have to do it sooner or later; why not now? What part is mamma playing?"

While Isoline was debating this subject in her mind, the viscountess arose and took her husband's arm, and said:

"You must see us to the door of the cabin, my lord; for I am sure we shall never be able to keep our feet on this deck."

The ship, in fact, was now rolling heavily.

The viscount drew his wife's hand close to his side and offered his other arm to Isoline, who took it gratefully and clung to it tightly, for her feet were as unsteady on the rolling deck as were her mother's. She observed that the viscountess drew her veil closely over her face as they passed down.

Near the head of the companion way they met Lieut. Belle Isle, who saluted the governor in military style as he hurried past, without looking at the two ladies, or seeing that his own wife was one of the two who hung upon the viscount's arms.

But then it was dark just where they had met, and the lieutenant was preoccupied and in a hurry.

Lord Seyres saw the ladies safely to the foot of the companion stairs, left them there, and returned to the deck.

Lady Seyres led her daughter to the door of her own stateroom, opened it with a small key that she took from her pocket, and led her in.

Then, when the door was closed and locked on the inside,

and the two women were seated together on the sofa, the mother threw her arms around her daughter's waist, drew her in a close embrace, and gave way to a burst of tears and sobs that shook her frame as a storm shakes a tree. Her excessive emotion greatly distressed her daughter, who with tender words and caresses sought to soothe her.

"Oh, mother, mother, don't! don't! Why should you grieve so? What have you to trouble you? Nothing in this world, I hope! He—the viscount—is a fine and noble gentleman. I like him very much. I am sure he will make you very happy. I am glad you married him—if no wrong was done Miss Smith," she said, amid tender kisses and caresses.

"Oh, Isoline! You do not know! You do not know! This unexpected meeting with you, here, my love, has filled me with joy and despair, whose conflict nearly crazes me! Yes, Isoline! joy and despair—strange as this junction of words may seem to you. Oh, my love, when I came on board this ship I thought I should never see my child again this side of the grave. And now! when I as much supposed that I had lost you from my sight forever as if the coffin lid had closed upon you—now to have you by my side, to have you in my arms, to know that I shall have you constantly with me for a four months' voyage, and that I shall have you living in the same town with me in that far-off country! Oh! Isoline, although this prospect is full of the perils of exposure, disgrace, and death, yet in the midst of my despair I rejoice!"

"Oh, mamma! Your words are mysteries that frighten but do not enlighten me! I fear—I fear—but I do not comprehend!" murmured Isoline, in distress.

"Isoline," said the lady, still sobbing, "tell me how much of my life you can remember. It will help me to tell my story."

"Mamma, I remember when we lived in the north of England, and papa's illness and death. I do not think I can remember anything before that. I always see papa 'in my mind's eye' ill in bed, with a long, thin, sallow face, framed in with very black hair and whiskers. I remember his funeral, with the 'mutes,' who frightened me, and our black frocks, that pleased me with the novelty and distinction of being in mourning."

"What next?"

"I remember our journey to the south of England, and our bringing Mrs. Pond and Lona with us."

"And then, Isoline?"

"I remember very clearly the whole of our lives at Stony Fells, from the day of our arrival at the great, old, solitary mansion until the sad, the awful day when I missed you from your bed. Oh, mamma! mamma! why did you leave me so?" wailed Isoline, sick with the memory of that sorrowful day."

"From necessity, as I told you before," said the lady, with a deep and shuddering sigh.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! we thought you were gone forever! We thought you were drowned in Demondike! Dennis Prout, the coast guardsman, saw you on the bridge in the darkness before day! The steward and stone masons from Hawkewood Hall found fragments of your dress caught in the briers and torn off, halfway down the descent to the chasm. Later on—there was found——"

Here the girl's voice broke down.

The lady finished the interrupted sentence:

"A body which was supposed to be mine and which was buried for mine. I read all about it in the papers at the time, and how that queen of frauds, Old Nan Crook, and Dennis Prout, the coast guardsman, got the reward. Yes, I read all about it at the time, and—I have seen my tombstone!"

"Oh, mamma! mamma! How can you bear to speak of it?"

"Why not? It was very kind of the duke to put it up. When do you think I saw it, Isoline?"

"Oh, I do not know," sighed the girl.

"Why, on the day that you were married. I was in the church, love. I had heard of my child's approaching marriage, and I was sure to be present at the ceremony, let what would come of it. I was then deeply veiled. You saw me as you passed on to the vestry to sign the register, and you almost recognized me."

"I did recognize you, mamma, and believed in the reappearance of departed spirits! That was not the first occasion on which I had seen you since your flight, mamma!"

Once in the night, on the terrace at Castle Belle Isle, and once at sunset, looking in at the library window."

"Yes, I was there. Oh, Isoline! haunting the neighborhood to get a sight of my child before leaving the country forever!"

"But no one, it seems, saw you but myself, mamma! And when I spoke of having seen you everyone believed me to be the subject of an optical illusion."

"And you, child?"

"I thought you were a spirit! What else could I think? I then, for the first time, believed in the reappearance of departed spirits! What else could I believe? How was it, mamma, that no one recognized you?"

"Simply because no one expected to see me, and I kept my veil down always except when looking out from solitary and safe points of view for you; and never entering a house, or walking on a public road, while in the neighborhood."

"But where did you sleep and eat, mamma?"

"In Penzance, where I was not known."

"And you made that long journey to and fro, on one day, on each occasion when you came to see me?"

"Yes."

"Poor mamma!"

"But, Isoline, to return to our subject—your reminiscences. You have seldom heard me speak of my girlhood, but you surely knew my maiden name?"

"Oh, yes, mamma, your maiden name was Smith, I know."

"A very common name—the commonest name in England! And with some slight modification, the commonest name in the world! How many Smiths do you and I know, Isoline?"

"Oh, I could not tell you, mamma? There was Smith, the laborer on the Hawkeville estate, and Smith, the miner, and Smith, the fisherman, and Parson Smith, and Dr. Smith, and Lawyer Smith, and Miss Smith, the great heiress whom the viscount was reported to be engaged to, but whom——"

Isoline paused and reddened.

"Whom I supplanted in his affections, you were about to say," interrupted the viscountess.

"Oh, no, mamma, I should never have said that."

"Well, you thought it, however, and you were wrong. I did not supplant Miss Smith in the viscount's favor."

Isoline looked up surprised, yet pleased.

"Then there was no truth in the newspaper report that he was engaged to the great heiress," she said.

"Yes, there was—perfect truth in it. He was not only engaged to that lady, but he married her."

"How could that be, mamma? The viscount married you. You are the viscountess," said Isoline, with a puzzled look.

"Yes, I am the viscountess and I was Miss Smith," said the lady, in a low tone.

Isoline gazed at her mother in a stupor of amazement for a moment, and then her face flushed deeply and her eyes fell.

Her mother, watching her, divined her thoughts.

"Foolish girl," she said, "of what are you thinking? I was Miss Smith, indeed; but then I was Miss Smith before I married Arthur Irvine, your father."

"I misunderstood you, mamma. I have misunderstood, or I have been misinformed about many matters. I have been led to believe that 'Miss Smith' never married; that her inheritance of the great Zavieski estate was made conditional upon her remaining unmarried during the lifetime of the testator," said Isoline, gravely, for she could not see how this lady could possibly come blameless out of this dark affair which looked so like—felony.

"Isola," said the viscountess, "you have told me, at my request, all that you remember of our joint lives. Now I will supplement that by telling you all that I remember of mine."

"If you please, mamma," said the girl, with a deep sigh.

CHAPTER X

A TEMPTED LIFE

"You know that I was the only child of the late Rev. James Smith, curate of St. Peter's Church, Lambeth, and that I lost both my parents in early childhood."

"I have often heard you say so, mamma."

"Well, then, when I was thus left an orphan I was placed at a first-class school to be educated at the cost of my only living relative, the Princess Maria Zavieski. Up to the time of my first school holidays I had never seen my great grandaunt. But, as it was at first arranged that I should spend my holidays at the Palace Zavieski, I made my patroness' acquaintance on the occasion of my first midsummer vacation. She was even then an aged woman, near seventy years. She lived alone in the solitary magnificence of the Palace Zavieski.

"I was called beautiful in those days, Isola, and the attendants of the princess were unreserved in their admiration and flattery of the 'little beauty,' or little heiress, as they were fond of calling me, and they often expressed their opinion that a young lady of so much beauty and such great expectations must make a very high match—must marry an English duke, at the very least, if not a foreign prince.

"The mere babble of the servants' hall—for it was no more than just that—at length reached the ears of the princess, as everything which went on in the palace did, for she was suspicious to a degree and had her spies in every department of the establishment.

"She was as jealous and selfish as she was suspicious, and this babble filled her with spiteful rage. 'What!' she probably said to herself, for it would have been like her to say it—'what! an insignificant little beggar like this made of so much importance in the house? So much beauty and such great expectations must marry a duke, must they? Or even a foreign prince, indeed! Great hopes are inspired by my fortune, it seems! I will see to that!'

"Isola, I never heard my grandaunt utter these words, but from all I know of her character and all that happened subsequently, I have little doubt she did use them, or others to the same effect.

"I was sent back to school after that, and brought no more to the Palace Zavieski to spend my holidays, which were always passed at the school.

"I was educated to become a governess. At the age of eighteen I graduated. Then my grandaunt summoned me to her presence for a brief visit.

"I went and found the Princess Zavieski confined to her chair with that paralysis of the feet from which she suffered for the remainder of her long life.

"She then gave me to understand the nature of my position and prospects. She would have no lazy beggars, she said, waiting for her money to squander on some fortune-hunting, poor nobleman. I should earn my bread by the toil of my hands, and the sweat of my brains, and the blood of my heart, as she had been compelled to do in her youth.

"Then, if I should remain unmarried, honestly laboring for my living until her demise, I should inherit the whole bulk of her immense estate. But if I should marry during her lifetime I should not inherit a shilling, and the entire property should go to the nephew of the late Prince Alexander Zavieski."

"To Cosmo Belle Isle, my husband," said Isola.

"Yes, the only sister of Prince Alexander married a younger brother of the Duke of Grand Manors, and Cosmo Belle Isle was their only son. I did not know these particulars at that time. I learned them afterwards, of course.

"Thus the Princess Zavieski thought she had given me fair warning of what I might expect to lose in the event of marriage during her lifetime. But ah! that warning, like many warnings, had come too late. I was already married!"

"You, mamma! You, then, married when you were scarcely out of school!" exclaimed Isola.

"I was married while I was still at school," replied the lady. "I will tell you how it came about. This school was kept by the wife of a clergyman in the north of England who had no children of her own. I was the only one among her pupils who was left at the school during the holidays. Her husband, the Rev. Joseph Jephson——"

"I remember him well enough, mamma."

"Of course you do, my dear. Well, he was in the habit of taking young men to read with him during the vacations. Among them was Arthur Irvine. I, living in the family, met these young men daily at meals, at prayers, and at church.

"I cared for none of them but Arthur Irvine. You remember your father only on his sick bed, Isola. You cannot know how handsome and attractive he was when I first

met him in his earliest youth. I, also, was said to be beautiful, exceedingly, in those days. We made acquaintance and formed an attachment to each other. I must be brief here. One day, about a month after we first met, we walked off and took a train to Scotland, and got married and returned before we were missed.

"Our act of imprudence could scarcely be justified even by our ardent attachment and our extreme youth. At the end of the holidays Arthur went to Oxford, and I recommenced my studies in the school where I had spent my vacation, and where I spent one more scholastic term, at the end of which I graduated.

"You may judge my dismay, therefore, when on going to spend a few days at Palace Zavieski I was told by the princess that my inheritance of her estate was conditional upon my remaining unmarried.

"I was a very timid girl at that time. I did not dare to confess my secret marriage. My silence, therefore, was caused by fear and not by cupidity.

"In obedience to my aunt's orders I watched the newspapers for advertisements in my line, and I answered many without success.

"At length, however, I got a situation as English teacher in an English, French and German school at Osnik. Of course, during the past year I had regularly corresponded with my young husband at Oxford; but I had never seen him since he left the Jephson Academy in Yorkshire.

"I now wrote to tell him of my intended removal to Osnik. He came up to London and met me by appointment, in one of the public parks. There we took leave of each other again for an indefinite time, pending Arthur's ordination and appointment to some curacy."

"But, mamma," said Isoline, in a piteous tone, "I do not understand, and I want to understand. Is not an elopement and a secret marriage wrong in any case, and worse in a clergyman than in others? I am not criticising you or papa at all. My heart aches too sorely for that. I am only asking for enlightenment."

"My dear, yes, of course, such conduct is very wrong in anyone, and especially in a clergyman; but poor Arthur was not a clergyman then. He was only a young theological student forced into his career by the arrangement of his

family, not called to it by a religious spirit. And he was madly in love with a pretty schoolgirl, who had no father or mother to consult. There was no reason why we should not have married, except that we neither of us had anything to live on.

"And when we did marry, despite this want of means, there was really no reason why we should not have married openly, except our own bashfulness, which was great under the circumstances, for I was a child of seventeen, and he a boy of nineteen—a beautiful, pale boy of delicate organization around whom hung that prophecy of early death which inspired a tender compassion no less potent with me than the love I bore him. I could not say no to him.

"I went to Osnik and entered upon my situation. By a strange coincidence—yet not so very strange, when we remember how common the name is—the principal of the school was another 'Miss Smith,' an English woman, of course.

"While I lived in Osnik I corresponded, as Miss Mary Smith, with my young husband at Oxford, who wrote me many long, loving letters, and with my aunt, the Princess Zavieski, who wrote to me about once in three or four months, by the hand of the domestic saint and martyr whom she called her *dame du compagne*.

"My aunt was a confirmed invalid at that time and confined for the most part to her chair. She summoned me to spend every school vacation with her. These vacations included two months in midsummer, two weeks at Christmas, and one week at Easter—all nearly three months, or one-fourth of the year.

"During these visits to the Palace Zavieski, the Oriental luxury and splendor in which I lived quite demoralized me, and unfitted me for the toilsome and ascetic life of a school mistress in a small German town.

"It was then that I conceived the design of keeping my marriage a dead secret from all persons and under all circumstances as long as my aunt should live, and after her death of having the marriage ceremony between Arthur and myself performed over again, as if for the first time; for remember, Isoline, our marriage was at that time a simple Scotch marriage, without ring, license, witness or register, and though perfectly legal, could never have been

proved unless the minister who performed the ceremony could have been produced.

"Writing from the school to Arthur, on my return from a long midsummer vacation at Palace Zavieski, I warned him to be more careful than ever not to betray by word, look or sign the fact of our marriage, lest it should deprive me of the means of living. I did not tell him in what manner the fact becoming known would injure me. I left him to suppose that it would deprive me of my situation in the school.

"I had never told him of the cruel condition of my aunt's will, which would disinherit me for marrying during her lifetime. I could not bear to wound him with the knowledge. And now I determined that I never would tell him, but would endeavor to manage my plan alone. In the present it was easy enough to manage, but in the future I saw difficulties. Ah, my dear Isola! My narrative becomes a confession. Do not judge me too harshly, my child!"

"My heart does not judge you; it only aches for you, mamma," murmured the girl, in a broken voice.

"The first difficulty was near at hand," resumed the lady. "Just before the end of the school term in the last year that I spent at Osnik, my husband wrote to me from Oxford that he should leave the university at the end of that term and receive his ordination, for that he had got the promise of a curacy—where do you think? Under his old preceptor, the Rev. Joseph Jephson, rector of St. Cuthbert's, at Woworth, in the North Riding of Yorkshire."

"Where you went to school, mamma?"

"Where I went to school, where I met Arthur Irvine, and from which we went away to be married secretly in Scotland. Arthur was always a favorite with Mr. Jephson, who, on the promotion of his old curate to a better living, immediately promised the vacated position to him. He expected to enter on his duties early in the ensuing month of September, at which time he begged me to make all my arrangements for joining him as his acknowledged wife.

"I wrote and congratulated him and myself on the speedy prospect of our union, and requested him to meet me at a certain point in London, where we could have some conversation.

"This was just before the end of the school term. I gave the principal of the institution warning of my intention to leave my situation, and, at her request, promised to find and send her a substitute when I should reach London.

"At the end of the term I set out to return to England, ostensibly to spend my vacation, as usual, at the Palace Zavieski. In point of fact, I went directly to the Palace Zavieski. I found my aunt still a cripple, confined to her chair, but having the constant attendance of the best medical science of the metropolis.

"I went out the next morning after my arrival to keep my appointment with my husband, who had come down from Oxford to meet me. We met in Hyde Park, as before.

"There I took him as much into my confidence as I dared, and as little as I dared. It was necessary to tell him something to obtain his co-operation; but I could not tell him everything, lest he should utterly disapprove and thwart my intentions.

"In short, I said nothing at all about the strange and cruel will of my aunt, rendering the inheritance of her estate conditional upon my remaining unmarried during her lifetime; for Arthur Irvine, who had not a mercenary thought in his mind, would never have consented to a deception for a mercenary motive.

"But I told him this: that my aunt was in very feeble health, and that her physician had warned all her attendants to keep her perfectly quiet and guard her most carefully from all causes of excitement or agitation. (This was true, observe.) I further told him that I had only recently discovered that my aunt was violently opposed to my marriage during her life. (This, also, was quite true.) That if she should discover that I was married without her knowledge and consent for more than a year, the shock would be so great that it would kill her, and I should have her death on my conscience all the remainder of my life. (This was not wholly true, but Arthur believed it.)

"Poor, dear Arthur! He believed all that I told him, and he agreed to co-operate with me, acting from the purest motives of benevolence, as I knew he would.

"I then unfolded my plan to him, which was this: I

would join him at Woworth as his acknowledged wife, and live with him in the curate's cottage there; but every midsummer, Christmas and Easter vacation I would visit my infirm aunt, as I had been accustomed to do, and would be known at the Palace Zavieski only as Miss Smith, as heretofore. And this custom I should keep up, for my invalid aunt's sake, as long as she should live.

"Arthur agreed to this plan, though bitterly lamenting its necessity. And having made all our arrangements for meeting at Woworth on the first of the ensuing September, we parted, Arthur taking the train back to Oxford, where he was reading up for his examination, and I going back to the Palace Zavieski.

"My next act was to seek out a teacher to supply my place at Osnik. And I was resolved that whatever other qualifications that teacher should possess she should have the name of Smith. I did not doubt but that I should find the very woman I wanted—London is so vast a place in population, and the name of Smith is ubiquitous.

"I did find such a woman—a very handsome woman—somewhat past her prime, with a very good education, but—without a character, or a reference.

"This woman suited me exactly. I liked her all the better for having no testimonials. I could give her a character that would be all sufficient with my late employer, and which would make her my slave and tool for the rest of her life; for her bread would depend upon my will.

"I made an arrangement with the new Miss Smith to this effect: That I would send her with a letter of introduction from myself to my late employer, the principal of the school at Osnik, giving her the highest character for moral and intellectual excellence and general fitness for the position she went to take; and thus give her an opportunity of recovering her respectable moral standing.

"In return for all these benefits, I required a slight service at her hands—to mail all letters that should come to the Osnik post office directed to Miss Mary Smith, to Hetley, Yorkshire—Hetley was a hamlet in easy walking distance from Woworth—and also to post all letters that I should inclose to her to be posted from the Osnik post office. These were very slight services for her to perform in requital for the great good I was doing her.

"This arrangement was made to enable me to keep up a correspondence with my aunt, from Osnik, where I intended that she should believe I continued to live and teach, and where she would write to me. Miss Smith would forward her letters to me in Yorkshire. I would answer them, dating from Osnik, and inclose them to Miss Smith, to be mailed from that town. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," answered Isola, with a deep sigh over the fraud.

"Do not look so wretched, or I shall not be able to continue my confession! Do you not suppose that my own conscience has troubled me on this account?" demanded the lady.

"I beg your pardon, mamma," said Isola, meekly.

"Well! The plan was carried out with perfect success. The new Miss Smith went to Osnik, where she was accepted on my strong recommendation.

"At the end of the vacation I took leave of my aunt and left the Palace Zavieski, ostensibly to return to my school duties at Osnik, but really to join my husband at Woworth in Yorkshire.

"He had a moderate salary, sufficient for our very moderate wants, and we also had a cottage rent free—a very pretty cottage it was, with an old-fashioned garden of flowers, fruits and vegetables—and there we lived very happily for several years. I kept up my correspondence with the Princess Zavieski through the Osnik post office, by the agency of Miss Smith; and I visited the Palace Zavieski regularly as before at all the school vacations.

"In the second year of my residence at Woworth you, my dear, was born. This happened soon after the midsummer vacation which I had spent with my aunt. At Christmas you were not quite four months old—too young to leave behind, while it was impossible, under the circumstances, to take you with me. I therefore wrote to my aunt, through the Osnik post office as before, begging to be excused from my usual visit upon the plea of a severe attack of bronchitis.

"My aunt wrote in reply the kindest, perhaps the only really kind letter she had ever written to me, inclosing a draft for fifty pounds, saying that she had noticed at midsummer that I did not look well, and that she hoped I

would dress warmly and take good care of my health, and she would send me fifty pounds every quarter day so long as I should remain unmarried.

"I wrote back, ardently thanking her for her 'great generosity' to me; and after that in all my letters I spoke of my ill health, until when the Easter holidays came around in February she herself wrote and advised me not to risk my health by traveling at that uncertain season of the year.

"Thus I did not visit the Palace Zavieski again until you were nearly twelve months old, and I could leave you with safety in the care of your nurse.

"So all my plans went on successfully. The Princess Zavieski never suspected my marriage, but continued to pay me my allowance of two hundred pounds a year in quarterly payments, and I was very happy for several years, until at length your father was stricken with his death illness, and I lost him.

"From the date of my widowhood your own memory will supply a great deal. After your father's death I had to leave our cottage home to his successor in the curacy. I had, however, the allowance made me by my aunt, which was sufficient for our support. I could live where I pleased in a moderate way. My health was not at that time very strong, and the village doctor recommended the south of England as a residence for me under the circumstances.

"Mr. Jephson, our pastor and patron, had a friend, the Rev. Dr. Vincent, who was settled at Hawkeville, in Cornwall. Mr. Jephson said it would not be well for me to go among entire strangers, so he suggested Hawkeville, where he would be able to introduce me into society, through a letter of introduction to his classmate, Dr. Vincent.

"Well, Isola, you remember our journey from Yorkshire to Cornwall, accompanied by our two attendants, Mrs. Pond and her stepdaughter, Lona?"

"Oh, yes, mamma; I do remember that."

"As soon as I was settled at Stony Fells I wrote to Miss Smith at Osnik to send no more letters to Hetley, but to send all that came to her post office, directed to Mary Smith, under cover to Mrs. Irvine, Hawkeville.

"This order she was quick to understand and execute, and all things went well with us. The princess paid my income punctually, though it went to Osnik before reaching me.

But as the princess seemed to have got into an incurable habit of living on forever, I began to think I had better not entirely depend upon her estate for our future support.

"So, after I had got over the first sharp grief of bereavement, I began to think seriously of marrying for rank and wealth, in your interest as well as in my own. I had beauty and the advantages of good society, and I might have married well enough to have made me independent and careless of the Zavieski millions, had not a vague suspicion overshadowed me. This arose from my frequent, long, unexplained absences, when at Easter, midsummer and Christmas I went to visit my aunt at the Palace Zavieski, where I was known only as Miss Smith.

"Thus we lived until that momentous morning at Castle Belle Isle when the Duchess of Grand Manors read out from the *Times* a notice of the sudden death of the Princess Zavieski. The shock overwhelmed me and I fainted.

"The hours that followed my recovery from that fainting fit were the most distressing I ever passed in my life. The crisis of my fate had come. Now, if I did not claim the property left by my deceased aunt, I should not only lose that, but also lose the small allowance I had received from her, and which was our only means of sustenance.

"This was the alternative before me—to meet absolute destitution for you and me, or to culminate my life of deception by simulating death, as Berry Irvine, so that I might never after that be sought for or inquired about, and to appear as Miss Smith, claim my vast inheritance and live and move in a sphere where I should never be recognized or suspected to be the Widow Irvine.

"But to do this I should have to give you up, my child, forever. That was the greatest trial I had ever been called to endure. Yet even for your own sake, no less than for mine, it seemed absolutely necessary that I should give you up. To have remained with you must have doomed us both to the most abject poverty.

"The struggle with my affections was but a brief one. I made up my mind to carry out the plan which I had studied from the first. I closed with the proposal the duchess had made me to engage you as the music mistress of her daughters. Having secured this position for you, I returned with you to Stony Fells for a brief season. You

remember that night of woe we spent there together, when you could not understand my distress?"

"Oh, yes, yes, mamma, I remember," responded Isoline, with a sigh that seemed to upheave her heart.

"My agony arose from the feeling that it was the last night we should ever pass together. In brief, as soon as you had left me and had gone to bed and to sleep, I arose and made my preparations for departure. I wrote a note to leave with you, to lead you to suppose that I was going in the early morning to Castle Belle Isle, on important business. I went, in fact, as far as Demondike, where I stayed long enough to manufacture evidence of my death by accidental drowning—that evidence which proved so conclusive to the coroner's jury that they brought in a verdict 'in accordance with the facts.'

"In the course of that morning's walk, in the darkness, before day, I met but one person, Dennis Prout, the coast guardsman, who was on his beat. He turned the bull's-eye of his lantern full upon me, and, seeing that I was not 'a suspicious character,' begged my pardon and passed on out of sight. After which I left the bridge and walked to the Hawkeville railway station, where, closely veiled, I took a ticket for the early express to London, where, first of all, I went to a mourning outfitting establishment, got a proper dress, and then proceeded to the Palace Zavieski, where I arrived, apparently in answer to the notice that I knew must have been sent to Osnik, but which had not had time to reach me at Hawkeville.

"I was in good time to attend the funeral of my aunt and the reading of the will, which constituted me her sole heiress. I entered into undisputed possession of my enormous fortune."

CHAPTER XI

BERRY'S DEADLY PERIL

"I ENTERED into undisputed possession of my estate," continued the lady, "and yet I held it not in peace! I was haunted with the fear of recognition by some of the people whom I had met in the autumn, or the Christmas parties

at Castle Belle Isle, and whom I might happen to meet in London.

"Two circumstances favored me, however—the first was, that neither the late Princess Zavieski nor myself had ever mingled much in London society, and therefore there could be few visits of condolence made to me. The second was that the year of mourning would give me a fair excuse for secluding myself, or seeming to do so, for I did not really mean to retire from the world, even for the briefest season; on the contrary—I determined to go abroad and see the world.

"I shut up the Palace Zavieski and went to Rome. There it was that I made the acquaintance of the Viscount Seyres. You may find it hard to understand it, in people of our years, Isoline, but indeed we were mutually pleased with each other, on our first interview," said the lady, with a deprecating smile.

"Oh, no, mamma; I can well believe it, for the viscount is really a very noble-looking and attractive man, and you are generally admitted to be a very handsome and fascinating woman," replied the girl, not with the air of paying a compliment, but rather that of stating unimportant facts.

"I spent a few months traveling over the Continent, the viscount journeying in my wake. Soon after my return to London, whither Lord Seyres followed me, we were engaged to be married.

"About that time I held one morning reception, taking care to send cards to no one who had ever known me in the country as Mrs. Berners Irvine. Also, I dressed my hair in the new style, just then coming into fashion, which so altered the character of my face and head that no one who had not known me intimately would have recognized me easily. My reception was a very great social success; but I was not happy, Isola! I was not happy! I wanted my child.

"I took the *Court Journal* to keep myself posted in the movements of the nobility, only for the sake of following the movements of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors, and knowing the whereabouts of my own child. I made many journeys in the country for the sake of seeing or hearing of you. I saw you many times, when you could not see me, although I learned from the gossip of hotel servants

and railway officers that my ghost had been seen on many occasions.

"Twice I sent you money in blank envelopes. Did you receive it?"

"Yes, mamma, but without knowing whence it came, or having an opportunity to thank the donor, as I do now."

"I am glad you got the remittances safe. By watching the papers I kept myself informed of all that happened in the family of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors. I read the account of the marriage of the Earl of Hawkewood and the Lady Volante Belle Isle, and of their departure on a lengthened wedding tour over the Continent.

"Later on I read of their return to England, and their settlement in their town house for the fashionable season. That circumstance compelled me to be very cautious. During their stay in town I gave no parties, accepted no invitations, but kept closely within doors, except when I went out in a close carriage.

"When they left town I felt myself comparatively free. The viscount pressed for an early marriage. I was, however, very cautious. I was haunted by the fear of recognition and discovery. I thought if such a calamity was in store for me I could better meet it as a widow than as a married woman. I put the viscount off from time to time. I was content with his society, of which I had a great deal. I was not eager to change the circumstances.

"It is not just to the man, however, to keep him hanging on in that way. So one day when my lord came to me and told me he had been offered the appointment as governor of Tasmania, but hesitated to accept it on my account, I begged him to take it at once, as I should go out with him.

"In fact, I liked the idea of going to a colony, where I thought I should be safe from recognition and discovery, and where, as the governor's wife, I should be first lady in the land, and hold a little court of my own.

"He was very glad to find me so willing to share his exile, as he called it. He had spent many years of his youth and middle age in an official capacity out there before he succeeded to his uncle's title, and he knew the colony well. This was the reason of his present appointment.

"Well, Isola, we arranged to be married on the day

before we were to sail for Hobart Town. I made haste to settle up my affairs in London. I let the Palace Zavi-eski, furnished as it was, to a Russian grand duke. I paid ten thousand pounds into the Bank of England to the credit of Isoline Irvine, of Hawkeville, in Cornwall; and had a notification sent down to you to that effect. You never got it?"

"No, mamma; but I thank you all the same."

"You never got it because you must have been on your journey to Portsmouth when that letter reached Hawkeville. I did not hear of your engagement, or your quickly approaching marriage, until the afternoon of the day when I had deposited the money to your credit in the bank, and had directed that notification of the same should be sent to you. But as soon as I did hear of it, Isola, I went down to Hawkeville by the night train, and reached the place just in time to see the marriage ceremony performed which united you to Cosmo Belle Isle.

"I had no idea then that he belonged to the regiment that was to be my husband's escort on the voyage, or that I should have your company on shipboard. Our meeting, Isola, was almost as complete a surprise to me as it could have been to yourself. This is my story. I feel somewhat easier since I have told you. Judge me as mercifully as you can, oh! my child, and keep my secret as long as it may be possible for you to do so," concluded the lady.

Isoline lowered her head upon her hand and answered nothing.

The viscountess exhibited signs of uneasiness.

When the silence had lasted a few minutes the lady gently broke it with a whispered inquiry:

"You will keep my secret, Isoline?"

"Oh! mamma! mamma! how can I keep such a secret? I could not keep it even if I would. And I ought not keep it if I could," moaned the girl.

"What do you mean, Isoline? Why ought you not to keep your mother's secret?" inquired the lady, with a painful contraction of her straight, black eyebrows.

"Oh! mamma, how can you ask? My husband, Cosmo Belle Isle, is the rightful heir of the estate you hold through this same secret," wailed Isoline; for every word was a wail of anguish.

"No! That I utterly deny!" exclaimed the lady, angrily, while a hot, red spot flamed upon her cheek—"Cosmo Belle Isle is not, never could have been, and never can be the rightful heir of the Princess Zavieski; he is not of her blood! He is a stranger and an alien, dragged into the case merely to enforce a cruel and unnatural condition upon me—so cruel and unnatural that it should have been held unlawful, void and of non-effect. No! and a thousand noes! Cosmo Belle Isle is not the rightful heir of the Zavieski estate!" concluded the lady, with the most passionate vehemence.

"Then, mamma, if not the rightful, he is certainly the legal heir of that property which you unlawfully hold! Oh, I am grieved to the soul to have to say this, mamma. But Cosmo is my husband. And even if he were not, I should not dare to become a party in such a——"

The girl's voice broke down in deep emotion.

"Fraud! Why do you hesitate to pronounce the bad word? Is it in tenderness to my feelings? You have not shown yourself so very considerate hitherto!" bitterly exclaimed the lady.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! I would that I had died before making this dreadful discovery!" moaned Isoline.

"Don't be maudlin! Tell me what you will do?"

"Oh, I do not know! I do not know!"

"Will you keep your mother's counsel? That is all I wish to know," vehemently demanded the lady.

"Oh, mother! How could I look my husband in the face, knowing that I kept such a secret from him? Knowing, also, that I connived at such a wrong done to him?" groaned the girl, wringing and twisting her hands in the anguish of the conflict between her love and duty to her husband and her love and duty toward her parent.

"You take the part of the strongest against the weakest, the husband against the mother, the man against the woman," bitterly exclaimed the lady.

"No, no, no, mamma! Not so! I take the side of right against wrong—as I must! as I must! because, Heaven help me, I cannot do otherwise!" moaned Isoline, burying her face in her outspread hands.

The lady contemplated her daughter in gloomy silence for a moment, and then said, cajolingly:

"Listen to me, my child! Let us reason together. I will endeavor to compromise this matter with you! Keep my secret while I live, and I will make over one-third of the whole Zavieski estate to your husband, Cosmo Belle Isle, at once, and I will execute a will bequeathing the remaining two-thirds, share and share alike, to you both, after my death. Come! Come! What do you say to that compromise?"

"Oh, mamma! I have no right to compromise with you, or to conceal from him—my husband!" sighed the girl, dropping her burning face into her trembling hands.

"Then I am to understand that you will not keep this secret?" demanded the lady, in bitter indignation.

"I have no right to keep it, mamma."

"You will betray it, though you deprive me of all my wealth?"

"Loss of wealth is not the greatest of calamities, mamma, even if you were to forfeit yours, which I do not believe you would! Cosmo would never impoverish you, mamma."

"Loss of wealth is not the greatest of calamities. You are right there," said the lady, ignoring the latter clause in her daughter's speech. "But your betrayal of my secret would involve losses much heavier than the loss of wealth, which may be regained—losses that can never be repaired in this world—loss of esteem, loss of reputation, loss of liberty! Yes, and loss of life! for I will not survive these other losses!"

"Mamma! mamma! what do you mean?" demanded Isoline, in an agony of terror.

"Do you not know, mad girl? Do you not know how the law may construe this act of mine? This guiltless act of simple justice to myself?"

"The law, mamma? The law would construe it into injustice and would give it all back to Cosmo," answered Isoline, speaking rather vaguely and incoherently in the confusion of her terror.

"The law would construe my act—my act, I repeat it, of simple justice to myself, into felony!"

"Oh, mamma! don't!" cried the girl, instinctively clapping her hands to her ears.

"Yes," continued the lady, seeing the deep impression she had made—"yes, felony! An ugly word, is it not?"

Would you bring your mother to a felon's dock? Condemn her to a felon's fate?"

"Oh, if I could only die!" wailed Isoline.

"Attend to me! Do you reveal my secret, and on my arrival at Hobart Town I shall be arrested, sent back to England for trial, and my next voyage to Australia will be in a convict ship," said the lady, sternly.

"Oh, have mercy! have mercy on me!" wailed the unhappy daughter.

"Now, then, what do you intend to do? Consign me to a felon's fate so that you and your husband may at once seize upon a fortune, one-third of which may be yours at once, the whole of which must be yours, sooner or later? I should think the disgrace involved in such an exposure would more than counterbalance any benefit to be gained from your immediate possession of the whole fortune," said the viscountess, with a bitter smile.

"Oh, mother! How can you think any such mercenary motive could enter my thoughts? Oh, mother! I act only from a sense of duty to my husband! But you mistake Cosmo. I am sure he would never let you suffer either in property or reputation if any act of renunciation on his part could save you. Oh, mamma, trust in Cosmo! Let me tell him!"

"Never!" vehemently exclaimed the lady. "My secret must and shall be kept!"

"Oh, dear mother, don't you see it cannot be! Even if I should be dumb on the subject, it must soon be discovered by others! Mamma, there are two others besides myself here on this ship who know you as Mrs. Berners Irvine, and would recognize you at sight."

"I dress my hair—I dress myself so differently from what I did down in Cornwall; the circumstances are all so changed; believing me to have been dead for a year past, and now meeting me under a new name, with a higher rank, and under totally opposite conditions from those in which they knew me, they will never recognize me for the same woman. They will see the strong likeness, but they will never suspect the identity, if you keep my counsel. Instances of strong likenesses have come into everyone's experience. But who is this second person on board who knew me in Cornwall? Some servant of Mr. Belle Isle?"

"No, mamma. A servant of mine—a servant of yours—Lona Pond!"

"Lona Pond! She here!" exclaimed the lady, in consternation.

"Yes, mamma; she who has grown up from childhood in your service, and would be sure to know you at sight."

"I must, then, avoid meeting her—ay, and Cosmo, also—face to face, and you must help me to do this, Isoline."

"I cannot! I must not be a party to this, mamma!" groaned the girl.

"Then there remains but one thing for me to do," said Lady Seyres, slowly and solemnly.

Isoline made no reply, but sat a picture of despair.

"But one thing left for me to do," continued her mother, in a tone of gloomy determination—"but one thing—to bury myself, my sorrow, and my shame, beneath the waves!"

"Mamma!" exclaimed Isoline, starting up with a sharp cry.

"I will as surely do it as I live now! I will do it the hour I find out that you have betrayed my secret!"

"Oh, that I knew what to do!" breathed Isola, in the extremity of distress.

"Listen to me! Give me a little time. Do not tell anyone yet. Promise me so much, Isola! I am your mother. Do not tell anyone to-day, Isola," pleaded the lady.

"Well, I will bear the burden of this secret one day longer, mamma. I would to Heaven I could conscientiously carry it in my bosom forever!"

"And—before you tell it, give me a few hours' warning—will you?" persisted the lady.

"Yes, mamma. I will not reveal your secret without first warning you," replied the girl.

Some one had been tapping lightly at the stateroom door for some seconds, but so absorbed were the mother and daughter in the subject of their discourse that neither seemed to hear or heed the summons.

Now, however, the cordial voice of the viscount was recognized, calling to his wife:

"Dinner, dear, dinner! Did you not hear the bell?"

Lady Seyres arose and opened the door a little way and answered:

"I do not want any dinner—could not eat any; thank you."

"Not seasick, I hope?" said the viscount, in a voice of concern.

"Yes, deadly seasick," sighed the lady.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. Let me in, dear! Let me see if I can do anything for you."

"Oh, no! Pray go away! Go to dinner and leave me alone. Don't you know seasickness demoralizes its victims, so that they hate all their fellow-creatures? Go and let me alone, I say."

"Can I send you anything from the saloon?"

"No, thanks, the stewardess and my own maid will attend to me."

"Belle Isle is here beside me, looking for his wife. I told him she was with you," continued the viscount.

"Well, she is here, and he can have her," answered the lady; then, turning to her companion, she said:

"Go, dear."

Isoline arose, trembling with emotion, and passed out into the main cabin, where Lord Seyres and Lieut. Belle Isle were standing together.

His lordship bowed with old-fashioned courtesy.

The lieutenant gave his arm to his wife, saying pleasantly:

"I hear that you have found an old friend on board. That is charming—for you! But what is the matter with you, love? You are pale and trembling! You are scarcely able to stand! Are you seasick?" he suddenly inquired, looking at her anxiously.

"I—I suppose I am—a little," she answered, with a feeble smile.

"Then bear up against it in the beginning, love, before it gets a firm hold on you. Walk about—talk and laugh—eat and drink as if there was no sea on the planet earth! 'Take time by the forelock,' 'resist the devil and he will flee from you!'" said the lieutenant, gayly, as he supported her steps toward the companion ladder.

In the saloon Isoline found her new friends, the ladies of the regiment, awaiting her.

They sat down at one table, where they showed but little

appetite, for the motion of the ship was beginning to affect them all.

Isoline was glad of the excuse of seasickness to retire from the table into the solitude of her own stateroom, where not even her husband intruded upon her, for duty called him elsewhere, nor her maid, for the latter, like most of her class, was the first to succumb to the malady of the sea and turn to her berth.

And for several days from this Isoline was confined to her stateroom with severe indisposition.

CHAPTER XII

THE FEARS OF A GUILTY ONE

MORE than ten days passed before the daughter saw her mother again. Isoline lay in her berth, prostrated with nervous exhaustion.

She was suffering much more in mind than in body, but all her illness was set down to the account of seasickness.

Lady Seyres sent her own maid, Mrs. Lowe, every day, to see Mrs. Belle Isle and to inquire after her health.

Isoline could not return the compliment by sending Lona, with respectful inquiries, to Lady Seyres' stateroom, for two very sufficient reasons. In the first place, Miss Pond was still laid up with seasickness. In the second place, even if she had been well, her mistress could not have sent her into the presence of Lady Seyres, lest in the person of the viscountess she should have recognized her own former mistress, and the secret should have been thus prematurely exposed.

Thus far the voyage of the *Australasian* had been very rough; but after ten days of high winds, and troubled seas, and very sick passengers, the weather changed and grew calmer, the winds went down, the waves subsided, and the seasick patients got well.

Isoline obeyed a standing summons from Lady Seyres to come to her as soon as she should be able to leave her stateroom.

Isoline went first of all to see her mother.

She found the viscountess stretched upon the sofa in her room, paler, thinner, and more haggard than she had ever supposed it possible for that lady to be.

"You have been very ill, my poor girl! I see it on your face. Sit down in that resting-chair beside me," said Lady Seyres, taking her daughter's hand and gently drawing her toward the seat in question.

"And you, mamma? You must have suffered very much, I fear. You look—worse than I feel!" said the girl, with unintentional, cruel frankness.

"Yes! and I have been feigning to be worse than I am! I have been manufacturing excuses to keep my room, lest I should meet Cosmo Belle Isle or Lona Pond on deck."

"That was hard, mamma! But I have been thinking, as I lay on my bed these many days; and I think Lona Pond's recognition could never hurt you."

"Why could it not?" demanded Lady Seyres, lifting her eyebrows in surprise.

"Because she knew nothing of the Princess Zavieski, or of Miss Smith. And though she would certainly recognize you as her former mistress, whom she knew for so many years as Mrs. Berners Irvine, yet she will never dream that you went by any other name until you married the Viscount Seyres. Of course, she will be very full of perplexity as to how you should be a living peeress when she supposed you to be a deceased widow; but so great is her timidity that she will never speak of her perplexity not even to me, her loved and trusted mistress. As to Cosmo, your danger of recognition by him is much greater. He knew you well as Mrs. Berners Irvine, and he knew the terms upon which Miss Smith inherited her grandaunt's fortune, and that Miss Smith subsequently married the Viscount Seyres. He would understand it all at a glance, mamma!"

"You say so! I am not sure of that fact. The circumstances are so diametrically opposite to those in which he first knew me, that I scarcely think he would recognize anything more than a very remarkable likeness between myself and the late Mrs. Berners Irvine! However, as there seemed a doubt on the subject, I would not hazard recognition. I confined myself in my stateroom, under the plea of indisposition, as I shall be obliged to do, except at night, for the whole of the voyage, I fear."

"That would be very hard, mamma. Your health is evidently already suffering from confinement," said the daughter, in a tone of tender sympathy.

This partly deceived the viscountess, who hastened to say:

"You have been thinking better of your resolution, while you lay ill in your berth, my dear. The pillow is said to be a good counselor."

"I do not understand you, mamma!"

"My secret! You will not reveal my secret now! You will accept my terms for keeping it! The third of my fortune down to Cosmo Belle Isle now, and the rest his own at my death?"

"Mother," pleaded Isoline, in a low, sad, tender tone—"do you not see that it is not for me to entertain this proposal? I only see one straight and simple line of duty—to tell my husband the secret; it so much concerns him to know."

The lady looked at her daughter long and wistfully before speaking again. Then she asked:

"When will you tell him?"

"I do not know. It will be a fiery trial to do so, at any time, and yet every day I keep this secret from him I feel that I do him wrong! Oh! that you could be induced to trust Cosmo. Oh! that you could be persuaded to make this revelation to him, as you have made it to me! It would come with so much more grace from you than from me! Explain the circumstances that tempted you to this course of conduct to him as you explain them to me, and you will not find him a harsh judge, mother! You will find him both just and merciful!"

"How can I expect either justice or mercy from my son-in-law when I cannot get them from my daughter—my only child?" bitterly inquired the lady.

"I would to Heaven I could die! I am in the grasp of a destiny, a torture engine, from which I cannot escape alive!" moaned the girl, burying her pale and tear-stained face in her hands.

"Hear me, Isoline. I repeat what I said to you a few days ago! You say you feel it to be your duty to tell this secret to Cosmo Belle Isle?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Then I repeat that within an hour after I hear that you have made this revelation to your husband I will bury myself, my sorrow, and my dishonor, in the depths of the sea."

Isoline uttered a low cry of anguish.

"I will do it as sure as I live to hear that my secret is out! I will never survive the shame!" continued the lady, with cruel persistence.

Isoline, with her face buried in her hands, moaned and rocked herself to and fro.

"And yet I want to live as long as I can! Oh, Isoline, my daughter! Your mother asks you for a little longer life—a little respite from this dreadful death by suicide!"

"Mamma! Mamma! My heart is breaking! I am dying! I am dying!" moaned the girl, in a faint voice.

"Not so! Grief does not kill! Hearts do not break! No, or mine must have been broken and I must have died within the last fortnight!" said the lady, in bitter scorn.

Nothing but sighs and tears responded to her.

"Hear me, Isoline! If you should give up my secret this day and I should die by my own act, your husband could do nothing whatever in the case, derive no benefit whatever from the fortune for three months to come, or until the ship shall reach Hobart Town. Meanwhile my poor life will have been unnecessarily abridged that much."

"Oh! my Father in Heaven!" cried the girl, clasping her hands and raising them in wild appeal. "This talk is enough to make me a raving maniac."

"Control yourself, Isoline. Defer your revelations to your husband until the ship lands at Hobart Town, when that revelation can be acted upon. Consider! The ship may never reach port. She may go down in a storm. She may perish even in a calm, or by a conflagration, and—I may be saved the crime of suicide and you the crime of having driven your mother to the desperate deed. I only entreat you to forbear until we reach Hobart Town, if we ever reach it, when the case can be acted upon, and then you may tell the secret, the telling of which must kill me, for I will not outlive dishonor! But forbear until then! It will do no good to tell my secret here. Nothing can be done! It will only shorten my life and load my soul with the crime of suicide and your soul with the crime of having

caused it. If you forbear until we land, something may occur in the meantime to avert the terrible necessity of the revelation and the catastrophe that must follow it! And I wish to live a little longer, Isoline, and to die and be buried on dry land! Will my child grant her doomed mother this reprieve? Will she forbear to drive her to desperation, to kill her body and soul, until we reach port?" implored the lady.

What could the poor, tortured, agonized and frenzied daughter do?

"I will keep this secret until we land, mamma," she breathed, in a voice so faint that her words could scarcely be heard.

And before her mother could make any reply, Isoline arose, opened the door and glided out into the cabin. Staggering, catching at the air for support like a drunken man, she reached her own stateroom, where she fell down upon the floor, insensible.

There a little later she was found by her husband, who lifted her and laid her in her berth and rushed off in great alarm to bring the surgeon.

This was the commencement of a severe attack of brain fever, which brought Isoline to the verge of another life.

Cosmo, Dr. Boggs and Lona Pond nursed her. The ladies of the regiment visited her when it was permitted them to do so, and offered their services to relieve the husband, the doctor and the nurse in their weary watching by the sufferer.

But Lady Seyres never went near the sick room. She sent her woman, Mrs. Lowe, two or three times a day to inquire after Mrs. Belle Isle and to express her sympathy with and anxiety for the sufferer. But she did no more.

How could she? She dared not meet Cosmo Belle Isle or Lona Pond face to face, for fear of recognition. There were moments when she thought she could brave such a recognition out, and that their firm conviction of her death and their established faith in the—to them—unimportant fact of Miss Smith, the great heiress, and Mrs. Berners Irvine, the poor widow, having been two distinct persons with nothing to do with each other, would bear her out, so that any acquaintance who might meet her now might see a

most extraordinary likeness without detecting identity between them.

Still she deemed it best to be cautious and keep on the safe side.

She was now beginning to suffer the severest penalties for her long life of fraud. She was tormented with anxiety for the suffering daughter whom, through all her own erring life, she had dearly loved, and to whose bedside now she could not venture to go.

That daughter might die—might die of the brain fever into which she, her mother, had thrown her, and—her knowledge of the dread secret would die with her.

But would the new viscountess be then safe? No! rather in more danger! Cosmo Belle Isle and Lona Pond would be certain, sooner or later, to recognize her, and then must come exposure and dishonor—without the living Isoline to meditate between the mother and the husband to avert the worst consequences of her fault.

Whichever way she looked, ruin confronted her.

Not the least item in the mass of misery and humiliation that threatened her was the changed relations she would bear toward her husband, the Viscount Seyres, whom she had grown to love and honor, and whose esteem and affection she now possessed and desired above all things to retain.

To lose them! To forfeit the place she held in her husband's heart! There was, indeed, madness in the thought.

Yet this, she felt, must be the penalty which, sooner or later, she must pay for the fraud she had committed.

Her threat of suicide was no idle one. She would not have survived dishonor. She was one of those women of whom the great poet wrote. Like her:

“That living, sinful thing
Whose every passion was a sting
Which urged to guilt, but could not face
That guilt's detection and disgrace.”

She had begged of her wronged, unhappy daughter a respite until the ship should reach port.

But then—what then?

She did not know. She only knew that she had the

respite, which was getting shorter and shorter as the ship neared her destination.

Meanwhile, the unhappy woman was almost a self-condemned prisoner.

Under the plea of seasickness, which no longer existed, she kept her stateroom the greater part of the day, scarcely daring to venture out into the cabin upon which it opened, lest she should be met and recognized by one of the two persons who had known her in Cornwall as Mrs. Berners Irvine.

She never went to the dining saloon, but took all her meals in her own stateroom, where they were served by the stewardess, and where she was waited on by her own woman.

She never ventured on deck until after sundown, when she came up, heavily veiled, leaning on her husband's arm, and walked for an hour, and then sat down with her face turned away from the ship and looking out to sea.

Her fellow passengers, and particularly the ladies of the regiment, commiserated her sad condition, and would have done anything in their power to relieve her had they been permitted to do so.

The voyage was half over before the crisis of Isoline Belle Isle's illness was passed and she was declared to be out of danger.

Her convalescence was very slow, tedious, and protracted.

It was a month longer before she was able to be carried up on deck; and then so extreme was her weakness that she fainted on the bed of rugs and cushions that had been prepared for her.

"How long," she panted, on reviving from her faintness—"how long will it be before we reach Hobart Town?"

"Not more than two weeks at farthest, dearest. Cheer up! The time will soon pass now and bring us into port," said her husband, who naturally supposed that his wife was weary of the long sea voyage.

But Isoline sighed profoundly, for the end of the voyage was, to her apprehension, the end of hope, the end of peace, the end of love, the end of life!

Isoline had been religiously trained by the rector of Hawkeville. She had been one of the fairest lambs of that

good shepherd's flock. But her faith was passing through a fiery trial now.

To show how terrible an influence her mother's fault and her own dilemma had upon this well-meaning girl, it is only necessary to say that deep down in the obscurest shadows of her spirit lingered a sinful and insane hope—an unacknowledged, desperate hope that the ship might never reach the land.

Oh! she would never, never have owned this hope, far less would she have expressed it. She would have been horrified had any human being uttered it. What! to wish that a ship, with a thousand innocent souls on board, should founder at sea, to save one guilty and two or three interested persons from shame and sorrow?

Cruel, horrible, monstrous thought!

And yet that thought, that hope, lived and lurked, unrecognized, in her bosom.

Did a cloud rise on the distant horizon? Did a whisper of foul weather ahead go round the deck?

These signs, that chilled other hearts with fear, inspired hers with hope!

Hush! whisper not this hope! But if the ship should founder, then she would not be compelled to reveal her mother's dishonor and drive that mother to desperation and death!

You see that, by her terrible position, her mind was thrown off its balance, and she was a little insane.

On the Sunday morning succeeding her first appearance on deck after her convalescence she attended divine service in the main cabin.

The chaplain of the regiment read the prayers, according to the form of the Church of England, which is almost exactly the same as our own Episcopal ritual.

Perhaps it was because Isoline had been so long absent from public worship that the solemn and beautiful Litany impressed her so deeply. And when "the form of prayer to be used at sea" was read in an earnest manner by the chaplain, the words so pierced her heart that the light of Heaven was let in, showing the depths of evil in her own soul of which she had never dreamed in her former easy-going, superficial, self-complacent religion.

"Out of the heart come * * * murders."

Here had she been cherishing a deeply lurking hope that this good ship, laden with so many hundreds of human souls, should go to the bottom of the sea to save herself and one other from an agony worse than death, that must be met and endured should they safely reach harbor!

And here were many Christians fervently returning thanks to the Almighty for their preservation from the dangers of the deep for so many weeks, and imploring His divine protection to bring them safely "into that haven where they would be."

Isoline had made a discovery that filled her with self-horror too great for tears. She could only in deep humiliation recognize and acknowledge the secret evil that was in her; and pray to the Heavenly Father to take it away.

After that came a strange trust. She could see no ray of light, no ground of hope, but she trusted, and found some peace.

The ship was nearing port.

It was early in the preceding December that they had sailed. It was winter then. Their Christmas had been celebrated on board ship, but she had taken no part in the festivities, for she had been confined to her stateroom by illness. In their voyage half around the world they had passed through every change of climate, and now, being within two days' sail of Hobart Town, they were in the month of March, and in bracing autumn weather.

It was early on the morning of the fifteenth that the man on the lookout caught the first sight of land.

A few hours later all the passengers who could leave their cabins were assembled on deck with telescopes and fieldglasses, which they passed from one to another, anxiously viewing that bold, rocky, and repellent coast, locking in the dark land chiefly known to us through the horrors of Macquarie Harbor, Port Arthur, Maria Island, and other convict stations.

Lady Seyres kept her stateroom; but her fellow-passengers remained on deck, never leaving it except for meals until the shades of evening gathered over the scene and darkness hid the dreadful fascination of those shores from view.

Isoline, who had been on deck all day, visited her mother in the stateroom that evening, and remained with

her several hours, describing the terrific scenery of the coast she had viewed, and talking of the colony they were approaching, but never mentioning the subject that was uppermost in both their minds. That subject had been avoided since the girl's attack of brain fever.

She left her mother's stateroom at eleven o'clock and retired to her own berth, where, being wearied, for she was still weak, she fell asleep and slept soundly until morning.

She was awakened by an unusual bustle in the main cabin. She found herself alone, her husband having left their stateroom while she slept, as was his usual custom.

She arose in haste and began to dress.

While doing so she perceived that the slow, laborious motion of the great ship had entirely ceased and that the *Australasian* was gliding along as swiftly and smoothly as a steamboat on a river.

This circumstance, taken in connection with the bustle in the cabin outside, revealed to her the fact that the ship had entered Derwent River and was very near port, and that the passengers were preparing to land.

"The day of judgment has come," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

"ALL IS OVER"

ISOLINE hurried through her simple toilet and went up on deck.

What a wonderful change! What a delightful scene met her view!

Had they passed out of Purgatory into Paradise during the night? The dark, "stern and rockbound coast"—the dread, frowning, threatening coast which seemed to inclose all imaginable horrors, and along which they had sailed all day and night—was left far behind, quite out of sight, and the ship rode at anchor in a beautiful little cove at the head of which stood Hobart Town, picturesquely built on rising ground and half encircled by an amphitheater of richly wooded hills, beyond which were lofty mountains whose blue summits towered to the clouds.

It was a glorious morning and a glorious scene. The sun had just risen in dazzling splendor, dispersing the few clouds that now floated, white and rose-tinted, over a deep blue sky, which was mirrored in all distinctness of form and color in the still, pure water below. The surface of the cove was smooth as glass and blue and brilliant as sapphire.

The beach on either side seemed almost as bright as the sapphire sea, and glistened in the sun's rays until its sands seemed golden and its pebbles amber.

From the beach the ground rose in green, undulating hills and dales, varied with groves and forests, until their outlines melted away in the distant cloud-capped mountains along the horizon.

Here and there white villas, whose beauty might have graced the banks of the Severn or the Thames, stood upon the sunlit hills or in the shaded valleys along both shores of the inlet.

They had come in from the wild sea and the dark, rugged, threatening coast to this fair haven.

Haven? Heaven, rather, it seemed in its calm beauty under the bright morning light.

Isoline gazed on the scene in surprise and delight that made her for a moment blind to the crowds of her fellow-passengers that covered the deck, and oblivious to the fact that this, to her, was "the day of doom."

A touch on her elbow called her attention.

She turned and saw a well wrapped up and deeply veiled lady standing on her right.

It was her mother. She had not seen that lady on deck for several weeks, and now at her touch she shuddered and involuntarily shrank away.

"We have come to anchor in Sullivan's Cove," whispered Lady Seyres.

"I know it," responded her daughter.

"Yonder seaport is Hobart Town."

"Yes."

"We have spent our last night, eaten our last meal on the *Australasian*."

"I suppose so."

"We shall land in half an hour. The boats are getting ready now to take us to the shore."

"Yes."

"And the day of judgment has come!"

"Yes."

"'Yes' and 'yes' and 'yes'!" angrily whispered the lady. "What do you mean by 'yes'?"

"I am only assenting to the truth of what you say, mamma," answered Isoline, humbly.

"Tell me plainly: Do you mean to inform Cosmo Belle Isle of his right to the Zavieski estate to-day?" inquired the viscountess, in a fierce whisper.

"I must inform him to-day, mamma. I have kept the facts which it is his right to know too long from him already. And though I would rather die than tell him, it is my duty to do so; and I must do my duty," sighed Isoline.

"You will be a matricide! I will not outlive such dishonor!" hissed the viscountess.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, mamma! Do not say such awful words! They freeze my blood!" wailed the miserable girl—miserable through the faults of others, not through her own.

Before another word could be said they were joined by the viscount, who came hurrying up to his wife, saying:

"Our boat is ready, my dear! Give me your hand!"

She thrust her hand within the bend of her husband's arm and left Isoline standing there.

The viscount lifted his hat to the younger lady as he led his wife away.

Isoline was almost immediately joined by Cosmo, who came in haste and said:

"We must go at once, dear. Our boats form a part of the new governor's escort."

"But everything is left in the stateroom."

"Where they will be perfectly safe for the present! Come!"

They went through the crowd on the deck, and reached the larboard side of the ship, where quite a fleet of gayly decorated boats lay waiting for the new governor and his retinue.

Viscount Seyres, with the viscountess, and their immediate guard of honor, filled one boat, which was manned by eight oarsmen.

Other boats were filled with officers and their ladies.

Cosmo Belle Isle handed his wife into her proper place and took his seat by her side. Another boat held the regimental band.

A valedictory gun was fired as the fleet left the ship, and headed up the inlet toward the town.

They passed ships of all nations, riding at anchor in the beautiful cove.

One ship, with the union jack flying at the masthead, attracted particular attention from the boats and caused exclamations of surprise.

"What is it?" inquired Isoline of her husband.

"Why, it is the *Labrador*, that was gazetted to sail ten days after our own, and here she is in before us—having made probably the fastest passage between London and Hobart Town on record. We shall have news from England ten days later than that we bring," laughed the young lieutenant.

As he spoke, the *Labrador* fired a salvo shot in honor of the new governor.

It was answered by a cheer from the boats as they passed close to her larboard side.

In a few more minutes the fleet of boats was at the wharf, where the ex-governor and his suit, the town authorities and the officers from the barracks, were waiting to receive the new man.

Carriages were in attendance to accommodate the viscount and the ladies and gentlemen of his suit.

A great crowd of citizens, comprising men, women and children, were on the wharves to see the sight—for the arrival of the ship with the new governor and a new regiment made a sort of Fourth of July or Fifth of November to the dull little capital of Tasmania.

These people raised a shout of welcome, which was, however, soon drowned in the rondo of salvo shots from the barracks as the new governor's boats touched the wharf.

Lord Seyres led his lady out to the coach especially waiting for them, but was met on his way by the dignitaries gathered to receive him, and was compelled to exchange greetings and compliments with them before he was permitted to put the viscountess in the carriage prepared for them and take his seat at her side.

The ladies of the regiment filled the other carriages, which soon fell into line behind that of the governor.

The regiment also fell in order behind the carriages.

And, preceded by a band of music and followed by a rabble of people, the procession marched to the courthouse, where the ceremonies of the new governor's installation into office were to be performed.

Isoline sat in a carriage with three other ladies of the regiment—Mrs. Colonel Newton, Mrs. Dr. Boggs and Mrs. Rhodes, the wife of the chaplain.

The carriages reached the courthouse in quite a bustle of reception.

The crowd here cheered and hurrahd as the crowd at the wharf had done, and it was with difficulty that way was made by the marshals for the procession to pass through the multitude into the courthouse.

The new governor, arm in arm with the ex-governor, entered the courtroom. Then all their official attendants followed. The ladies went in alone—their husbands were on duty elsewhere. They were shown to their seats by the marshals.

The ceremonies of installation were uninteresting, but brief. A few forms were observed, a few speeches were made, and all was over.

The newly-appointed governor, with his suit, the ex-governor, the town authorities and the colonel of the new regiment, all went to a banquet at the Royal Victoria.

The regiment went to its quarters in the barracks, which had been vacated by the relieved regiment, which was now on shipboard, bound for England.

Cosmo Belle was kept by duty to his post; but he sent his wife and her maid, under the charge of a friend and fellow-passenger, to the Royal Victoria, where rooms had been engaged for her, until his quarters at the barracks could be made comfortable for her reception.

It was a positive relief to the young wife and unhappy daughter to find as this dreaded day passed that there was no opportunity for an interview with her husband, and so she was respited from hour to hour from the dreadful duty of denouncing her own mother to her husband.

When night came, fatigued and depressed, she sat in her room at the hotel waiting for the appearance of her

husband—not with longing, but with dread. She prayed—prayed earnestly—that some deliverance might come to her out of her great trouble—and she tried to hope against hope that her prayer might be answered.

She believed it to be her bounden duty to tell the dreadful secret she possessed to her husband on the very first opportunity. She was resolved no longer to palter with her duty, but to tell Cosmo the secret it was his right to know, and to tell it that night before they should sleep—unless—unless something should happen to render it impossible for her to keep her resolution.

Oh, how she wished, in the depths of her heart, that something might happen!

While she sat thus a chambermaid came to her room bearing a note, which the girl told the lady had been brought by a soldier from the barracks, and that he would wait for an answer.

Isoline opened the envelope and read:

“OFFICERS’ MESSROOM, HOBART TOWN
BARRACKS, Thursday Evening.

“DEAREST LOVE: I feel so annoyed to find that I cannot get leave to-night. I am on duty here and cannot get away to see you until morning. Keep Lona Pond in your room all night, and see that the fastenings of your doors and windows are secure. This I advise merely to make ‘assurance doubly sure.’ You need not be afraid. You are quite safe. Heaven bless you. Cosmo.”

“Another respite!” said Isoline to herself, as she heaved a deep sigh—not of disappointment, but of relief. She sat down and penned the following lines:

“ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL, Thursday Evening.

“MY OWN DEAREST ONE: Do not give yourself a moment’s uneasiness. I am not afraid to stay here with Lona Pond in this well-filled house. If circumstances permitted I would like never, never to be parted from you even for an hour. But when duty interferes to separate us for a few hours I must not, and I do not, complain. May Heaven bless you also!

ISOLINE.”

She sent this note down by the chambermaid to the soldier who was waiting to take it to the barracks.

And Isoline breathed again.

But presently the chambermaid re-entered her room bearing another letter.

"Brought by an orderly from the government house, if you please, ma'am, which he says it is immediate, and he will wait an answer."

Isoline took the letter and recognized her mother's handwriting.

She opened it "in tremor and in fear."

She read:

"GOVERNMENT HOUSE, Thursday Evening.

"ISOLINE: I know that your husband has been occupied all day, so that you have had no opportunity of confiding to him the dreaded secret you feel it your duty to tell, even at the price of your mother's life and honor. I know also that Lieut. Belle Isle is on duty at the barracks, and that you are alone at your hotel, and that you will have no occasion to make your communication to him until to-morrow morning.

"I also am alone in my private apartments, his excellency being closeted with some gentlemen for the evening.

"Now, I must have a *tête-à-tête* with you this very night. I have received by the *Labrador* the most startling news from England, which will profoundly affect my destiny and yours. I must impart this news to you at once, before you have any explanations on a certain subject with your husband.

"Come to me without delay. I send a carriage for you.

"You may bring your maid, if you please; but if you do, you must leave her in the carriage outside while you come in to me. Come quickly to your sorely tried but still affectionate mother,

M. SEYRES."

Isoline folded the note and put it in her pocket, summoned her own maid, and said:

"Give me my traveling hat and sacque, and then get ready quickly to attend me. I am going out for a drive."

The astonished girl was too respectful to express her feelings on this seemingly strange resolution of her mis-

tress to start out for a drive through a strange city under the shadows of the night, but she muttered a little to herself as she obeyed the order, and brought the gray cashmere suit and gray felt hat from their boxes, and then went to put on her own black bonnet and cape.

They turned down the gas and left the room, locking the door after them.

The carriage waited before the private entrance of the establishment.

Mrs. Belle Isle and her maid entered it, and were rapidly driven through the town to the government house.

The orderly who had brought the message to Mrs. Belle Isle, and who had ridden on the box beside the coachman, now got down and spoke to the sentry at the gate, who then threw wide the leaves and let the carriage pass in.

Two lamps on each side of the main entrance showed a flight of broad stone steps leading up to the double doors.

Here the orderly knocked for admittance.

The summons was answered by a porter in a white wig, white neckcloth and black broadcloth suit, and who looked like a stout bishop.

A footman, in livery, who had evidently had his orders to this effect, stood waiting to receive the visitor, and immediately upon her appearance made an obeisance and said:

"This way, if you please, madam,"—and led the lady through a lofty hall, up a broad staircase, and to a double door above, which he threw open as he announced:

"Mrs. Belle Isle."

Isoline found herself in a spacious, splendidly furnished, but dimly-lighted apartment, from some glimmering obscure corner of which a lady emerged and advanced to meet her.

The footman, meantime, had closed the door and retreated.

The lady took the precaution to turn the key before she held out her hand to her visitor.

The malachite clock on the richly-wrought Italian marble mantelpiece struck seven as their hands met.

"I thank you for coming, Isoline. 'Small favors gratefully received,' you know. I suppose, if you had got the chance to do so, you would have told your husband to-day that I was keeping him out of the entire Zavieski estate by

a fraud that, if brought home to me, would be felony, punishable with transportation and penal servitude!" was the sarcastic greeting of the lady.

"Oh, mamma! What terrible words! I cannot see it in that light. I should never have put it in that way!" faltered Isoline, with a shudder.

"It would have amounted to the same thing in the end. Sit down," said the viscountess, as she led her daughter to a crimson satin sofa, pushed her gently upon it and seated herself at her side.

"Mamma! Hear me! I do love you. I would much rather die, now in my youth, now in my happy married life, than tell that secret whose disclosure must bring you to sorrow and mortification, but which still it is my sacred duty to tell!" said the girl, in a sobbing voice.

"It is no longer your duty to open your mouth on the subject! The most fanatical moralist living would consider it no longer your duty to interfere!" said Lady Seyres, in a curt tone.

"I wish to Heaven it were so! but I do not comprehend you, mamma," said Isoline, while a gleam of hope lit up her eloquent, dark eyes.

"I told you that I had received news from England by the *Labrador*, which sailed ten days after our ship, yet got here two days before her."

"Yes, mamma."

"That news came in a letter from my lawyer, and it is of a nature to change all the circumstances of our case, and to relieve you of all responsibility in the matter of Cosmo Belle Isle's fortune."

"Oh, my mother!" exclaimed Isoline, in great emotion. "Can this be really so? Can light have arisen in this deep darkness? Hope in this profound despair? Oh! what is this blessed news, my mother?"

"You shall hear Mr. Poinsett's letter. That will tell its own story. I did not get my letter, which was in the governor's mail, until after his excellency had returned from the public dinner at the Royal Victoria, and had leisure to examine his budget. Immediately after reading this letter I sent for you to share the good news."

"And that news, mamma? That news?" eagerly exclaimed Isoline.

The viscountess turned up the light of the moderator lamp on the sofa stand and drew a letter from the pocket of her ruby velvet dress.

"It is from Poinsett, poor man! He thought I would be quite overwhelmed by the news he had to tell me. He little knew what a deliverance it would be. Listen:

" 'LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, LONDON,
Dec. 15, 18—.

" 'MY DEAR MADAM: I fear the announcement I am about to make will fill you with as much surprise and distress as I myself experienced on first discovering the facts.

" 'You may remember that on the occasion of the reading of the will of my late client, Maria, Princess Zavieski, I informed you that I had not been employed to draw up that will, and that my father and predecessor had drawn it up, under the immediate verbal instructions of the princess, and that the custody of the will had descended to me with that of all other documents relating to the Zavieski estate, which came to me with the business of my father.

" 'At the time that I produced this will, after the funeral of the late princess, I had not the slightest suspicion that a later will existed.

" 'Last week, however, on opening a box containing some old leases to which I wished to refer, I found, to my astonishment, a will dated some five years later than the one under which you inherited the whole property.

" 'By this later will, which is regularly drawn up and witnessed, the whole property is bequeathed equally and unconditionally to you and to Cosmo Belle Isle, share and share alike.

" 'How the former canceled will happened not to be destroyed, and the last will came to be mislaid, I cannot understand, except upon the reflection that the last will was drawn up and executed during the months of my father's life when age and infirmities had rather incapacitated him for the details of office business.

" 'However, the present will is the only one valid in law, and under it the nephew by marriage of the late Princess Zavieski—Lieut. the Hon. Cosmo Belle Isle—inherits half the estate.

" 'I am really very sorry for this on your account.

"Waiting your instructions in the premises, I am,
madam, your obedient servant, PETER POINSETT."

"There!" said the viscountess, "that is the lawyer's letter. I have the legal right to one-half my late aunt's estate, for it was left me unconditionally. Cosmo Belle Isle has a legal right to the other half, and to no more. So he will not be wronged out of a farthing. He will, of course, receive the rents and the interest of invested funds to the amount of half the income of the estates for the last year, and an equal share of the real estate and capital as soon as the transfer can be made. So you see, Isoline, you have not the least occasion to denounce your mother to your husband," concluded the lady.

"No, I have not, And, oh! how I thank Heaven for this deliverance!" exclaimed Isoline, bursting into tears and sobbing for joy.

"Of course, I have a confession to make to my own husband—a most humiliating confession indeed, which this new will at once forces upon me and facilitates," said the viscountess, in a grave tone.

"Mamma, love! however it ends, you will feel happier for having made the confession. It must be a terrible cross to bear through life to carry in one's bosom a secret from a confiding husband," murmured Isoline, now with her arms around her mother's neck and her lips pressed to her mother's cheek.

"Ah! you have found that out in the last three months' experience, my poor child!" sighed the lady, returning the caress.

"Yes, I found that out in the last three months, when I kept a secret from Cosmo," breathed Isoline, in an almost inaudible voice.

"And now, love, I am going to send you home to your hotel. And when you come again, my dear, I hope to receive you as my acknowledged daughter. I shall make a full explanation to the viscount and trust in his generosity and affection for forgiveness," said Lady Seyres, as she touched the bell.

A footman appeared.

"Show Mrs. Belle Isle to her carriage," said her ladyship.

Isoline kissed her mother and left the room, attended by the footman.

On descending to her carriage she found Lona Pond sitting within it, fast asleep.

"Back to the Royal Victoria," she said, as she took her seat.

Her entrance had been so gentle as not to disturb her maid's slumber, but the starting of the carriage did so, and Lona Pond started up with a shiver, and drew her shawl around her.

"I never knew the month of April so raw and so cold, ma'am," said the girl.

"We are at the opposite end of the world in which we were born, and here April corresponds with November," said Isoline, with a smile. "And when July comes we shall have snow and ice," she added, with another smile.

"What a queer country! How far are we from—Australia, ma'am, if you please?" inquired the girl.

"From Australia?" repeated Isoline, musingly. "Let me see—the north coast of this island is about one hundred miles south of Australia, and the island itself is about two hundred miles from north to south. We are at the south and about three hundred miles from Australia," replied the lady.

Her maid stared in astonishment and disappointment for a few minutes, and then burst out with:

"Oh, my good gracious alive, dear ma'am, I didn't know that! I thought all these outlandish places was huddled up close together, and Melbourne and Sydney and Hobbyton was as near each other as Hawkeville and Belle Isle and Bowling Green, at home!"

"They are many hundred miles apart," replied the lady.

The girl fell into a mournful silence. How ever should she find her sweetheart in this wilderness of space?

It was so late when they arrived at the hotel that Isoline, on reaching her chamber, at once dismissed her maid to bed.

But the lady herself did not retire to rest. She threw off her hat and jacket and dropped into an easy-chair and fell into deep thought.

She was relieved of the terrible necessity of denouncing her mother to her husband. The second will of the late

Princess Zavieski had given Cosmo Belle Isle an equal share in the estate—all that he had a right to expect. Her mother could not, therefore, wrong him out of one penny.

As to the fraud she had committed, that was now an affair to be settled between the viscount and the viscountess. Since it no longer affected the interests of Cosmo Belle Isle, Isoline was exonerated from the responsibility of enlightening him on the subject.

But what a task—what a humiliating task lay before her miserable mother—to confess the fraud of which she had been guilty to the pure and noble-hearted husband who had loved and worshiped his wife as one of the most excellent as well as one of the most beautiful women in the world!

Isoline feared to think what might be the result of this confession! Would the viscount's affection for his beautiful wife survive the shock of seeing her overthrown from the high pedestal of honor upon which his faith had enthroned her?

He could no longer honor her as before, that Isoline felt and knew.

Could he even continue to love her?

Isoline shuddered at the doubt that crept into her heart.

But evidently her mother expected a final condonement of her fault. And this expectation seemed to grow out of the fact that by the second will of the late Princess Zavieski one-half of the vast estate was secured to her unconditionally and could not be forfeited by a confession of her first and secret marriage.

This expectation betrayed a low moral sense in the mother that deeply pained the daughter, for the viscountess seemed to attribute to the viscount all the mercenary motives that governed her own conduct, and when she talked of trusting in his affection and generosity for the condonement of her offense, she, too, probably meant the affection and generosity of an impecunious old nobleman, who, having nothing on earth but his income of two thousand pounds per annum as governor of a convict colony, would appreciate the good policy of keeping on the best terms with the wealthy wife whose immense fortune was in her own hands and at her own disposal.

Isoline believed that her mother utterly deceived herself in this estimate of the viscount's character and motives. She believed that if ever Lord Seyres should be led to condone his lady's offense, it would be through the purest love, the most compassionate love and no base motive whatever.

She felt no further compunction in keeping her mother's secret; since that secret did not in any manner affect the interests of Cosmo Belle Isle, but was now strictly a matter between her mother and her stepfather, she felt bound to respect it.

At length, fervently thanking Heaven for her own deliverance out of her dreadful dilemma, and praying for divine protection and guidance, Isoline went to bed and to sleep.

Not until the next morning after breakfast did Isoline see her husband.

He came to the hotel just as she had finished her coffee and roll, which she took in her own room, because she did not wish to appear alone in the public eating saloon.

Cosmo Belle Isle came in bearing a packet of letters in his hands.

After affectionately greeting his wife, and asking about her health, he handed her the parcel, saying:

"To think these should have laid at the barracks' office all day yesterday without my being able to get them! They came by the *Labrador* two days ago. Here is one from Grand Manors, one from Hawkewood, one from old Ball of Bowling Green, and one from the archbishop, for me; and one from Volante, one from Victoria, one from Olive Ball and one from Dr. Vincent, for you. Quite a pile. And they are all dated ten days later than the day we sailed from England. I have read mine as I came along, and though you may wonder at it when I tell you, yet I assure you there has been no startling event happened in that interval! No governmental or social revolution, no domestic calamity or triumph! All seems to have gone as well with our native country as if we had never left it!" concluded the young lieutenant, with a comical smile.

Isoline took her mail and opened and read her letters, while he threw himself into an easy-chair and drew the

latest copy of the London *Times*, that had come out in the *Labrador*, from his pocket and began to read it.

"Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed.

Isoline looked up from her letters.

"I have unexpectedly come into a fortune, I fancy!" he continued.

"What about it?" inquired the young lady, with a shrewd suspicion of the truth, inspired by the knowledge she already possessed.

"Listen!" exclaimed Cosmo, and he proceeded to read the following paragraph:

"It is rumored that a second will of the late Princess Zavieski has been found, of a later date than the one which was read after her funeral, which it supersedes. By this will the enormous fortune of the deceased princess is bequeathed equally and unconditionally to her grandniece, Mary Smith (now Viscountess Seyres) and Lieut. the Hon. Cosmo Belle Isle, who is her nephew by marriage."

"There! What do you think of that, my dear?" inquired the young man, lifting his candid blue eyes from the paper when he had finished reading the paragraph.

"Cosmo, I have heard it before," replied the truthful Isoline, being thus appealed to.

"You have heard it before!" exclaimed the lieutenant, in surprise.

"Yes, Cosmo! The viscountess sent a carriage for me last evening that took me to the government house, where she communicated the news to me, which she had just received through a letter from her lawyer, Mr. Peter Poinsett."

"Then the news must be true! When and where, and under what circumstances was this last will found?" inquired Mr. Belle Isle.

Isoline told him.

"It is true, then! Oh, my beloved wife! How happy this circumstance makes me for your dear sake! But why did you not tell me this, since you knew it, when I first entered the room? I should have thought you would have burst upon me with the news! Overwhelmed me with it!" demanded Cosmo Belle Isle, with dancing eyes.

"I do not know. I was waiting for my moth—I was waiting for the Viscountess Seyres to make the communication to you, as it concerns you both. And then, again, you gave me no time to say a word about it—thrusting these letters into my hands," replied Isoline, with an embarrassed smile.

"You were dazed a little by the news, I suspect. You look dazed now!" said Cosmo, laughing in his delight.

"But is it not strange that none of our correspondents have mentioned this last will in any of their letters to us, although its existence was made public through the *Times*?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle.

"No, dear; for, if you will observe, the date of the *Times* in which this paragraph appears is one day later than the postmark on the letters. The letters had to be mailed from Cornwall the evening before the mail ship sailed from London, and this copy of the *Times* was published on the very day upon which the *Labrador* sailed, and was sent on board as the latest news from England."

"Oh! I see. But, Cosmo, tell me. How long am I to remain in this hotel, separated from you?"

"Only until my quarters in the barracks are repaired and refurnished for your accommodation, love. I am having this done in the best manner and at my own cost, and now I shall not spare expense. Your rooms shall be fitted up as comfortably and luxuriously as the limited resources of Hobart Town will admit."

"But how long will it take to do all this? Oh! don't you know, Cosmo, that I would rather be with you in the dilapidated old quarters than live away from you in the most elegant hotel apartments?"

"Yes, I do know it, dear, and your feelings only reflect my own in this matter. But it will not take long to prepare your nest, love-bird! In a week, at the furthest, it will be ready for you. But now about your letters. Have you read the mail?"

"I have skimmed them."

"And what is the news from Olly, and Volly, and Vick, and the good rector?"

"Not a bit of news. A great deal of gossip, but no news; nobody that we know has been born, married or died since we left—up to the time these letters were written."

"‘No news is good news.’ Well, what is wanted?"

The last question was addressed to Miss Pond, who had put her head into the door.

"If you please, sir, it is the soldier from the government house. He has brought a note for my mistress," answered the girl, as she walked across the room and laid a folded paper in the lap of the lady.

Isoline opened it and read:

"GOVERNMENT HOUSE, Friday Morning.

"ISOLINE: All is over! I have had a full explanation with Lord Seyres this morning.

"Oh! he has forgiven me! He has forgiven me like his own noble and magnanimous self!

"But I am overwhelmed with sorrow and humiliation! For I know now through the deep grief that it has caused him how great my sin has been! And though he is more deeply grieved than angered, and though, having once forgiven me, he will never, never, by word or look, reproach me with my fault, yet I feel and know that I have fallen so far beneath his esteem that I can never, never be reinstated in it!

"Oh, it is bitter! It is passing bitter!

"The hardest words he said to me were these:

"‘Since you were married under your maiden name, to which you had no further right, we must be quietly remarried by our chaplain and under your proper name. Since this was to happen, I am glad that it has happened at the antipodes of our native land. It will save us both much exposure and mortification.

"‘But we must not let the guiltless young people suffer for our own misfortunes. Send for your poor daughter and her husband. See them alone at first. It will be less embarrassing. I will see them later.’

"Yes, Isoline, those were his words! I never loved and honored him so much as now, when, oh, my soul! I have forfeited his good opinion forever!

"He has gone out and left me here to receive you and Cosmo. Come at once and bring him to your poor mother.

"M. SEYRES.

"P. S. Show Cosmo this letter if you will, and prepare him, as you come on, for what he is to see and hear."

"M. S."

Isoline finished and folded the letter, with a deep sigh. "That is a long note, my love! Who is it from and what is it about—if I may be permitted to ask you? You need not answer unless you like," said Lieut. Belle Isle, in a light and bantering tone, for the young fellow felt very gay and happy over his unexpected inheritance of a fortune.

"It is from my moth—from the Viscountess Seyres. She wants me immediately at the government house. And you will escort me there, if you please, dear," said Isoline, with some embarrassment.

"Certainly! I shall be happy to see her ladyship at last. Do you know I have never had the honor of setting eyes on the viscountess' face?"

"I know," answered Isoline, in a low tone.

"But, darling, why do your thoughts run upon your dear mother so persistently this morning? Twice you have said 'mother' and corrected yourself by substituting viscountess or Lady Seyres."

"There was a good reason for that slip of the tongue, which I will explain as we go on, Cosmo," replied Isoline, in a grave tone.

"Is the viscountess like your mother in appearance?" persisted the lieutenant.

"Very like! You might take her to be the same woman," replied his wife.

"Do you know I have often thought so?"

"Thought what?"

"That the head and form, the air and manner and gait of Lady Seyres were strikingly suggestive of your mother. I never saw her face to face, however."

"You will see her face to face this morning," said Isoline, as she quickly arrayed herself in hat, jacket and gloves for her ride.

Cosmo escorted her downstairs to the pavement, on which the carriage from the government house awaited them.

"Tell the coachman to drive slowly. I wish you to read

this letter as we go along," said Isoline, when they were seated side by side on the cushions.

Cosmo gave the order, and the carriage horses moved off at a walking pace.

Isoline put her mother's letter in his hands, saying:

"Please to read this quite through before you make any comment on it."

Cosmo took the paper with a look of gentle surprise, unfolded it, and began to read.

Isoline never turned her eyes away from his face, which she watched with the deepest interest.

As he read his fair forehead puckered into a frown of perplexity. Sometimes he turned back and read a paragraph over a second and even a third time.

Finally he finished the perusal of the letter, and, still holding it open in his hands, turned his bewildered eyes to meet the anxious gaze of Isoline, and demanded:

"What in the name of Heaven is this letter about, Isoline? I can make nothing of it beyond this—that Lady Seyres seems to be your mother—an impossibility, you know."

"It is a truth. She is my mother," sighed the young wife.

Her husband stared at her.

"Your mother? Lady Seyres your mother!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she breathed in reply.

"Who, then, was Mrs. Berners Irvine—your foster-mother?" demanded the lieutenant, in a troubled tone.

"Mrs. Berners Irvine was my mother, and is the present viscountess. She married Lord Seyres," murmured Isoline, with the tone and manner of a criminal.

"But—this is all incomprehensible! Your mother died a widow. Lord Seyres married Miss Smith, the niece of the Princess Zazieski, and co-heir with myself to her great estates."

"My mother was Miss Smith before she was Mrs. Irvine or Lady Seyres. Her first marriage was concealed from her aunt, the Princess Zavieski, and from all persons except her few country neighbors; and these latter did not suspect her identity with the heiress of the Princess Zazieski. At the decease of the princess she simulated death

as Mrs. Berners Irvine, so that she might appear in London as Miss Smith, and claim her inheritance of the Zavieski estate," Isoline explained, in a low and humble tone.

"And under the name of Mary Smith she deceived and married the Viscount Seyres?" demanded the young lieutenant, in a stern tone.

Isoline replied by a short nod and a single, smothered sob.

"And this was what she had to confess to his lordship?"

Another mute nod was the answer.

"How long have you known these facts, Isoline?"

"Only since, by accident, I recognized my mother on the ship. Oh, Cosmo, it was a shock! I had believed her to be in Heaven, you know. I wanted to tell you immediately! I did not want to keep the secret from you, Cosmo! No, not for a day! But my mother pleaded with me not to betray her until we should all reach Hobart Town, and, moreover, she took a solemn oath that if I did she would cast herself in the depths of the sea! And, after all, she was my mother! What could I do but promise to keep her secret until we should land here? It was the struggle of my mind that threw me into the brain fever that had so nearly proved fatal. Cosmo, I should have told you yesterday had there been an opportunity for me to do so."

"What induced her ladyship at last to divulge the secret?"

"The news of the discovery of the second will, and also the knowledge that it could no longer be kept hidden," said Isoline.

As she spoke the carriage drew up before the government house

CHAPTER XIV

FACE TO FACE

ISOLINE'S heart was throbbing violently.

"Oh, Cosmo," she whispered, in a half-suffocated voice, as the hot blood surged up over bosom, neck and face—"oh, Cosmo, in the midst of justice remember mercy! Do

not wound her by word or look, if you can possibly avoid doing so. She has suffered so much."

"In the midst of all things I shall remember that she is your mother, dearest, and that will be a guarantee that no word or deed of mine shall injure Lady Seyres," replied the young husband, as he handed his wife from the carriage.

They were received at the hall door by the same pompous porter and conducted up the grand staircase by the same footman who had attended Isoline on her first visit.

This man led the way to a pair of double doors on the right of the landing, opened them, announced:

"Mr. and Mrs. Belle Isle," and retired.

The young pair found themselves in a small, elegant drawing-room, upholstered in satinwood and rose-colored silk, and adorned with mirrors and vases.

On a sofa at the farther end sat Lady Seyres, in a morning dress of white cashmere, trimmed with swan's-down, and without any ornament whatever, unless the little Mary Stuart cap of fine English thread lace that partly covered her rich black hair could be called such. Her face was so deadly pale that it was of the same creamy color as her costume.

She attempted to rise to receive her visitors, but immediately sank back half fainting.

Cosmo and Isoline hastened to her side, and each took a hand of hers.

She attempted to address them, but her voice faltered into silence.

The two young persons still standing on each side of her, gently holding each a hand of hers, cast down their eyes; they could not look on her, who, in her humiliation, could not endure their gaze.

"Sit down," at length faintly spoke the lady.

They pressed and released her hands, and drew chairs up to her side and seated themselves—Cosmo on her right, Isoline on her left.

"Isoline has told you all," said the lady in a low tone, turning to the young man.

"All," answered the latter.

"What do you think of me, Lieut. Belle Isle?" the lady

next asked, in a low monotone, made steady by great effort.

It was a most embarrassing question, to which the young man did not at once reply.

"You may utter your thought. You may as well utter it as harbor it. What do you think of me?" repeated the lady.

"I think, then," began the young man, in a grave but gentle tone, "I think that you have suffered, and that you have yielded to an almost irresistible temptation."

"A quite irresistible one. I could not help myself, Cosmo Belle Isle. No woman was ever placed in so horrible a dilemma as I was put in by my aunt's first, capricious and most cruel will. She had no moral right to make such a will, whatever her legal power might have been. I was her next of kin, and her only living relative. I was the natural and legal heiress to the whole of her vast fortune. If she had died intestate I should have inherited every penny of her millions. She had no right, I insist, to make my celibacy the sole condition of my inheritance of that estate, which at her death should have been mine unconditionally and of right. What do you think?" she suddenly demanded, turning in a defiant and aggressive manner from one to the other of her listeners.

"No, she had no right to make such a will," said Cosmo, without hesitation.

Isoline said nothing.

"I was very young, called beautiful, and was extremely warm-hearted. I was in love and—I was already secretly married, when the princess first told me the unnatural, cruel, monstrous terms of her first will. I was shocked and terrified beyond measure. I had always been led to believe that I was the legal heiress of the princess, and that I should naturally and unconditionally inherit all her possessions at her death—that they were mine by right. Was not my assumption a natural one?"

"Quite so," replied Cosmo Belle Isle, who seemed willing and even anxious to agree with the erring and humiliated woman wherever he could truthfully do so.

"What could I do? I was still at school at the expense of my aunt. My young husband was still at college at the cost of his father. Our marriage, though legal and in-

dissoluble, was, as yet, but a nominal one, entered into only to bind us to each other—to let us be sure, in separation, that we belonged to each other—and only to be consummated when we should be able to set up housekeeping together! What could I do? Confess my marriage to my unnatural kinswoman and be turned into the street to beg or starve? And bring down the anger of his father upon my boy husband? I ask you, what could I do?” demanded the lady again, turning fiercely from one to the other of the young people beside her.

“Nothing, I suppose,” sighed Isoline, reluctantly.

Cosmo made no answer.

“That is precisely what I did do—nothing! That is to say, I made no confession of my marriage at the time, but went back to my school—I had been spending my midsummer vacation with my aunt when she told me of this horrible will—and remained there until I graduated. But I have told all this to Isoline before.”

“Yes,” sighed the young lady.

“Circumstances at once tempted me to conceal my marriage, and favored and facilitated the concealment from my aunt, both while I was at the school and after I had left it to join my husband in Yorkshire. And every year that passed rendered the concealment more easy and the confession more difficult, until it became, at length, impossible. All this I have already more fully explained to my daughter here.”

“Yes,” breathed Isoline, almost inaudibly.

“All through my short married life, all through my long widowhood, I kept my secret. The death of the princess brought my affairs to a crisis. I could no longer live a twofold life. I had to die as Mrs. Berners Irvine in order to live as the heiress of the Princess Zavieski. I committed an unpardonable fraud, you will say,” added the lady, and she paused for a reply.

“You suffered a horrible temptation,” gently answered Cosmo Belle Isle.

“An irresistible one, as I said before,” said the lady, emphatically. “I did not believe that you, an alien to her blood, had any right to succeed to the fortune that I should have inherited unconditionally by right, but that I should forfeit by the confession of my marriage; and not only

should I forfeit the fortune by such a confession, but even lose the little income that had been allowed me by my aunt. You perceive that my case was a very hard one."

"It was hard," sighed Isoline.

"The alternative set before me was this: on one hand the inheritance of enormous wealth, my own rightful fortune, at the price of the suppression of my marriage, which was nobody's business; on the other hand, the loss of my just inheritance with absolute destitution for myself and daughter. Do you see?"

"We see," answered both the young people, in a breath.

"Do you wonder that I chose the first alternative; that I chose wealth and my rights to penury and my wrongs? I simulated death as Mrs. Berners Irvine. I claimed and enjoyed my rightful inheritance as Miss Smith. Did I do so very wrong? Answer me, both of you!" exclaimed the lady, who had goaded herself into a state of defiance.

"I am not your judge, Lady Seyres," replied Cosmo Belle Isle, in a grave, quiet tone.

"I understand the covert censure of your words, sir," said the lady, coldly. Then turning to her daughter, she inquired:

"What do you say?"

"Oh, mamma, do not ask me, dear! It is not for me to criticise you," replied Isoline, as the crimson tide swept over her bosom, neck and face.

"Yet you do, in your hearts, both criticise and judge me! Ay, and unjustly! For I was not utterly selfish in what I did! I made a provision for my daughter! I founded an asylum for aged and destitute men and women! I made handsome donations to nearly every public charity in London! And, Cosmo, I was only waiting some favorable opportunity of dividing my fortune with you—not because I recognized your right to any portion of it, but simply because the whole had been willed to you, however unjustly, on a certain contingency. Do you believe this?"

"Certainly, Lady Seyres. It would never occur to me to doubt your word," replied the young lieutenant, gravely.

"My marriage with Lord Seyres made no difference in my plans. I told the viscount that I wished to divide my fortune with Cosmo Belle Isle, who was the grand-nephew of the Prince Alexander Zavieski, who had been the hus-

band of my grandaunt, and from whom her wealth had first come. Lord Seyres entirely approved what he termed the justice of my intentions."

"And they were just, dearest mamma!" exclaimed Isoline, who seemed anxious to seize any good opportunity of agreeing with her mother.

"Ah, yes, but the unexpected meeting with my daughter on the deck of the *Australasian*, and her fixed, immovable resolution to reveal my secret to her husband, and of another on board, who had known me as Mrs. Berners Irvine, and from whom I could not have permanently concealed my identity, forestalled all my plans. I pleaded for and obtained a delay of the revelations until we should reach Hobart Town, as we did yesterday morning. But, Cosmo! Isoline! had that revelation been made before the news of that second will arrived, I should have ended my erring and unhappy life by suicide! Yes! I should have died by my own hand!" said the lady, solemnly.

Isoline shuddered so strongly that Cosmo put his arm around her waist to support her.

"That blessed second will, conceived and executed in the spirit of justice, makes all right—with one exception—one bitter exception—that must be my punishment through life; my husband, my honorable and most honored husband, has lost his respect for me! He is merciful, he is charitable, he is affectionate, but he is no longer confiding. In his high sense of honor he views my fault with great severity, even while he treats me with tenderness. Oh, children, it is hard to lose the esteem of so good and noble a man," said the viscountess, in more agitation than she had yet betrayed.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! you may recover his esteem," said Isoline, with emotion.

"Never!" exclaimed the viscountess. "Never in this world! Life is too short for such a work! I have his love, for love cannot be destroyed in an hour; but it is no longer just the same—no longer the love of an honorable man for his honored wife, but the love of a compassionate man for the erring woman who is legally bound to him! And, ah! in his strict integrity, he cannot even find the slightest excuse for her fault. He does not find impending destitution and irresistible temptation any excuse for my

course of conduct. Ah! my punishment, like Cain's, is harder than I can bear!"

They did not answer. They could find nothing to say. They knew too well that she spoke the truth.

The viscountess then arose and touched the bell.

"Serve refreshments here," she said to the man who answered the summons.

He drew a round table up to the sofa where the lady reclined, and near which the two young people sat, and then left the room, but speedily returned with a waiter, on which was arranged a service of chocolate, cakes, jellies, fruits and other delicacies.

"You may go now. I will ring if I should require you," said the viscountess to the footman, who immediately retired, closing the door behind him.

"Draw up to the table. We must take something to keep us up. The viscount will be here presently. Isoline, pour out the chocolate. I find chocolate an excellent sedative to the nervous system," said the lady, as she received from the hand of Cosmo Belle Isle the cup that had been filled by the trembling fingers of Isoline.

While they sipped their chocolate, the viscountess, in some embarrassment, entered into a further explanation.

"As I hinted in my letter to you, Isoline, my good husband thinks that inasmuch as I was married to him under my maiden name of Smith, to which I had no longer any claim, instead of under my widowed name of Irvine, which was my only one by right, it may be necessary to insure the legality of our union by having the ceremony performed over again under my proper name. My lord has taken partly into his confidence the chaplain of the regiment, who will attend him here in a few minutes. The affair will be quietly gone over here in this room, with only you two as witnesses."

As the lady spoke, she rang for the service to be taken away.

"His lordship's compliments, my lady, and he is ready to wait on you," said the servant, as he took up the waiter to carry it out.

"Say to his lordship, with my respects, that we are ready to receive him," replied Lady Seyres.

The man bowed and left the room.

A few moments later Lord Seyres entered, accompanied by the chaplain.

Both gentlemen bowed to the company present.

Then the viscount took the trembling hand of Isoline and gravely and silently pressed a kiss upon her crimsoned brow; for he felt how much humiliation the girl was suffering for the mother; he then shook hands in a friendly manner with Cosmo Belle Isle.

Finally he went around the table, stooped and whispered a few words to his wife, who immediately arose from her seat on the sofa.

The married pair then stood side by side behind the little table. On the bride's left stood Isoline, and on the bridegroom's right Cosmo—as witnesses. The officiating clergyman, in plain citizens' black clothes, without his vestments, stood before them with a small prayer-book in his hand.

Without another word spoken he began the second ceremony that was intended to rivet more securely the bonds that already united the couple.

It was soon over, and the new marriage certificate signed and witnessed by all the parties present.

The viscount placed a munificent fee in the hands of the minister, who soon after took his leave.

Then Isoline had leisure to observe her stepfather. She saw how heavily that blow which had deprived him of respect for his beloved wife had fallen on his head. He seemed to have aged ten years in the last few hours since she had seen him at his installment in the courthouse. His once noble and radiant countenance was now careworn and sorrow-stricken. Yet his manner was very calm and self-controlled, and his demeanor toward his faulty wife was very tender, and toward her daughter and son-in-law kind and considerate.

"You must stay and dine with us to-day, my dear young friends, and we must become better acquainted," he said, with a grave and genial smile.

"I thank you, my lord, for myself and wife. No doubt Mrs. Belle Isle will gladly accept your invitation to remain with her mother for the day; but as for myself, I regret to say that duty calls me to the barracks almost immediately," replied the young lieutenant.

"Sorry to hear that, my dear sir; but though you go on duty now, perhaps you may be able to get off and return to join us at dinner this evening? We dine at seven. What do you say? Can you do so?"

"Thanks, my lord; I think I can."

"We shall expect you, then."

"I shall be very happy to come," said the young officer, as he arose to take leave.

"What? Going already? Then I think I will accompany you. I have an appointment with the Rev. Mr. Rhodes, Dr. Boggs and Col. Newton at headquarters this morning, to go with them to inspect the prisoners' barracks," said the governor, also rising.

"I shall be most happy in your company, my lord," said the young lieutenant.

And then he went to Lady Seyres, lifted her hand respectfully to his lips and bade her good-morning, then kissed his wife and turned to leave the room.

"Good-by for the present, my dear. Do your best to cheer your mother while we are gone," said the viscount, gently, as he pressed his stepdaughter's hand and left the room with the young officer.

"He thinks such a culprit as I am must need a great deal of cheering," said Lady Seyres, bitterly, as the door closed behind them.

Isoline did not reply.

The young lady spent perhaps the dullest day she had ever passed in the whole course of her life with her mother at the government house. They sang a little, played a little, read a little and talked a little, but the hours seemed interminably long and heavy, and Isoline was glad when the hour came that brought the viscount and the lieutenant to dinner.

Later in the evening visitors dropped in, to all of whom Lord Seyres introduced Isoline as "our daughter, Mrs. Belle Isle," and Cosmo as "our son-in-law, Lieut. Belle Isle."

And as these colonial people knew no particulars of their governor's marriage or antecedents, they took these imputed relations as matters of fact and not of mere courtesy.

Isoline and Cosmo, therefore, found the evening pass more agreeably than the morning had done.

At eleven o'clock they took leave and returned to the Royal Victoria.

A few days after this Isoline joined her husband at his quarters in the barracks, which had been fitted up comfortably and even luxuriously for her reception.

CHAPTER XV

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER

ISOLINE depended much for society on the ladies of the regiment, and there were a good many of them in the Hobart Town barracks.

There were the wife and three grown daughters of Col. Newton; the wife and two daughters of Surg. Boggs; the wife and one daughter of Chaplain Rhodes; and the wives of the other staff and line officers.

The colonel's house was a handsome edifice built of the native dark-gray freestone, with a flourishing garden and conservatories; the officers' quarters were neat and comfortable.

The ladies soon inaugurated weekly sociables to be held in rotation at the house of the colonel and the quarters of the principal officers. This was among themselves; a strictly garrison arrangement in which no outsiders were invited to take part; and the recreations were of the simplest sort—quadrilles for the young people and cards for the old ones, and an inexpensive refreshment of tea and cakes for all.

Besides the barracks sociable the ladies had a limited circle of outside acquaintances among the families of the civic and colonial officers.

Upon the whole, the young English bride found "the other end of the world" much more habitable and enjoyable than she had expected to do.

Not so her maid, Lona Pond. Since their arrival in the colony the girl's spirits had drooped and continued to droop.

One day, while she was in attendance on her mistress, the latter said:

"It gives me great distress to see you so depressed in spirits, Lona. You seem to be very unhappy here. What is the matter? Tell me; I am your friend. If you are homesick and wish to go back to England, we will procure you a passage in the *Bengal*, that is to touch here on her voyage to England from Melbourne, at the first of the month. You have only to speak. Would you like to return home by the *Bengal*?"

"No, madam. Why should I wish to return home? I came out here because I had no friends left in England, and you, my young mistress of many years, was coming. I have you here, madam, and I have no one in England. Why should I wish to return?"

"Then if you are not homesick, Lona, what is the matter with you, my girl? Confide your trouble to me and I will help you if I can," said the lady, in so kind a tone that the girl suddenly broke down, burst into tears and wept heavily.

Isoline waited until her maid had exhausted her paroxysm of emotion and then repeated her question.

"I will tell you, madam, since you are so good as to ask me," murmured Lona, as a deep blush rose to her brow. "You may remember Ham Gow—he who was falsely accused of the murder of the young Earl of Hawkewood—falsely, indeed, madam, for he knew no more of that crime than I did."

"The Hawkeville tramp? Yes, I remember his name."

"Madam, he was well educated and well conducted, although he was poor and people called him a tramp. Now, if a rich gentleman walks all over the world they call him a pedestrian, and praise his athletic strength and endurance; but if a poor man goes afoot from place to place they call him a tramp and commit him for vagrancy! If Ham Gow, who walked from village to village because he could not afford to ride, was a tramp, then Lord Longlim, who walked from Calais to St. Petersburg because he liked best to use his legs, was no better. I beg your pardon for speaking so free, madam."

"I can readily excuse you for defending your friend, my poor Lona. But what about this man, Gow?"

"Madam, he and I were engaged to be married."

"Lona!" exclaimed the lady in dismay.

"Yes, madam, we were. He had no bad habit except wandering about to pick up jobs, and he promised to stop that as soon as he got money enough to settle down and marry. So, madam, we were engaged."

"Where is he now, Lona?" kindly inquired Mrs. Belle Isle.

"In Australia somewhere, madam. I—I thought I should meet Ham out here when I came. I thought Sydney, Melbourne, Hobberton and all these outlandish convict places were close together like Hawkeville and Belle Isle and Bowling Green at home. And they are hundreds and hundreds of miles apart, you say, madam?"

"Yes."

"And I am as far from Ham as if I had stayed in England."

"Oh, no, for then you would have been thousands and thousands of miles away from him."

"Ah, madam, but if I had stayed in England he would have known where to write to me. Now he doesn't."

"My poor girl! If you wish to return to England you can do so, as I have explained."

"But I don't, madam. I only wish to find out in what part of Australia Ham is, so that I may let him know my address and hear from him."

"My poor Lona, do you not know that wherever in the colony Gow may be, he is in hiding? Have you forgotten that there is a warrant out for his arrest under the charge of having murdered Lord Hawkewood?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle, in a subdued voice.

"Oh, I know he was accused—falsely accused—of that horrid crime; but I thought he was safe here at this extreme end of the world."

"Not at all, unless he remains in hiding. I am very sorry for you, Lona. I will do anything in the world I can to comfort you, but now I can only recommend to you to be patient and to trust in divine providence," said the lady, in a gentle and sympathetic tone.

"I try to do that, madam. Otherwise I think I should lose my mind," said the girl.

After this conversation Isoline, who had always been very kind to her maid, became more thoughtful than ever of her happiness.

Often she made Lona the companion of her walks through the wild and beautiful country around Hobart Town.

Very often, when the lieutenant was off duty for a day, he would get an open carriage and, with his wife and her maid, take a long drive out to Mt. Wellington, or up to Lake Saint Clair, and spend a night at some squatter's station, and return early the next day.

These excursions through a country varied by scenery the most beautiful, picturesque, sublime and terrific that can be imagined gave great delight to Isoline.

On one occasion a party of ladies and gentlemen, consisting of Lieut. and Mrs. Belle Isle, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes, Miss Rhodes and Ensign Norwood, set out on horseback to ride to Mt. Wellington to explore such ravines and rocks as could not be reached by carriages.

They had breakfasted at dawn of day, and left the barracks at sunrise.

Passing the prisoners' barracks, where the wretched convicts in their yellow felon garbs were already at work breaking stone, under the eyes of their jailers and the carbines of their guards, the equestrian party passed up Masquarrie Street, and thence by New Town Road to the open country.

All the forenoon they rode through beautifully variegated scenery of heavily wooded hills and dales, where the herbage and the foliage, now in April, wore the brilliant hues of October—for it was now autumn at this end of the world.

At noon they bivouacked at the foot of Mt. Wellington, and then, after an hour's rest, they remounted and resumed their explorations.

They wished to go to the top of the mountain, or as near it as possible.

They made little essays through the dense thicket of scrub woods and thorns, rocks and briers, gullies and bowlders, but here nature defied them.

Mt. Wellington, whose savage fastnesses had never been desecrated by the invasion of the engineer or road-maker, presented an impenetrable front to the prospectors.

"It is the magic wilderness of the sleeping beauty in the fairy tale. It would require the magic steed and spear of the fairy prince to break through it," said Mr. Belle

Isle, raising his eyes to the stupendous precipices of which the mountain side was composed.

"You have hit it this time, Belle Isle!" exclaimed Ensign Norwood.

"What do you mean?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Struck the very pupil of the bull's-eye!" added the ensign.

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Belle Isle.

"Don't you!" laughed Norwood.

"There's many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer never meant."

"I wish you would explain yourself, Norwood," said the lieutenant.

"All right. So I will. You observed, did you not, that this savage wilderness was like the impenetrable wood of the sleeping beauty—or words to that effect—did you not?"

"Yes, but what of that?"

"And I said that you had hit it."

"You did; but what did you mean?"

"Just what I said—you had hit it. This formidable thicket is a wilderness surrounding the palace of an enchanted beauty. I have known it for some weeks," said the ensign, solemnly.

"And now you speak in enigmas," said the Rev. Mr. Rhodes.

"Not at all. I am speaking plain truth, as I will soon prove. Follow me, gentlemen and ladies. Miss Rhodes, let me lead your horse. The road is not safe just here. Belle Isle, keep close to Mrs. Belle Isle's side. Mr. Rhodes, look to madam's horse. This is not the boulevards, mind you," laughed the young ensign, as he led the way down a dark, deep ravine that might have suggested to a reader of Dante the entrance to the infernal regions.

Deeper and darker the descent, until they seemed to leave daylight far behind them.

This sunken ravine wound around the base of the mountain for a mile or more, and then doubled upon itself, and almost imperceptibly wound upwards toward the light, until between the steep sides of the deep and narrow pass glimpses of the blue sky could be seen overhead.

Higher and higher wound the ascending pass now, until at length they came out near the top of the mountain upon a plateau, from which a vast panorama of exceeding, marvelous beauty, radiance and sublimity was spread out before them.

An exclamation of amazement and delight burst simultaneously from the whole party.

Wooded hills and valleys, in all the glory of their many-colored autumn foliage, and in all the splendor of the afternoon sunshine, rolled away until they melted into the purple mountains, whose sunlit summits were lost in the mists above the distant horizon. Here and there bright lakes, like mirrors, set in woods and vales reflected the scenery of hills and clouds.

The party of explorers gazed entranced.

Was this our earth, or some more heavenly planet, with more divine scenery?

"How came you to discover the labyrinthine pass that leads to this magnificent view, Mr. Norwood?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle, in a voice subdued by awe.

"By a mere chance, in one of my solitary rides, madam," answered the young officer, lifting his hat.

The party was still gazing spellbound over the prospect, when Miss Rhodes suddenly inquired:

"But what about the palace of 'the sleeping beauty in the wood,' Mr. Norwood?"

"Withdraw your gaze from hills and valleys, clouds and mountains, and look down below your standing ground," he answered.

Every one did as he directed, and a cry of surprise and pleasure burst forth.

Halfway down the savage side of the precipice was a vast plateau, which seemed a perfect Garden of Eden, in the exceeding bright beauty of its lofty trees, luxuriant shrubs, and lovely flowers. From the midst of this garden arose a fairylike palace of glistening white stone, whose elegance of form seemed the perfection of architectural skill.

This plateau on the terrible precipice, this oasis in the desert, this Eden in Gehenna, seemed to the group of spectators who were looking down upon it to be perfectly inaccessible from above and from below.

"Whose place is it?" inquired the chaplain.

"How can it be approached?" asked the chaplain's wife.

"How was it ever built and planted?" inquired Miss Rhodes.

"Who lives there?" questioned Mrs. Belle Isle.

As all these interrogatories were put simultaneously, they constituted a confusion that rendered intelligent answers impossible.

"I do not in the least believe in the existence of that paradise, poised in midair! It is nothing but a mirage, a *fata morgana*, a hallucination, an optical illusion—a painter's vision, a poet's dream, but no reality!" said Lieut. Belle Isle, with his eyes riveted upon the scene.

"You have shown us the palace, but where is the princess?" inquired the chaplain's daughter.

"Yes, where is the princess?" added Mrs. Belle Isle.

"Where should the sleeping beauty be but in some innermost chamber of the palace, waiting the kiss of the fairy prince to awaken her?" retorted the young ensign.

"Do you know who owns or occupies the strange place, Norwood?" inquired Lieut. Belle Isle.

"I know only what I have been able to pick up in the town, and that is very little. It seems to be a case of romance in real life, surrounded by mystery."

"Oh, a story!" exclaimed the chaplain's daughter.

"No! not a story—that is to say, no one can get at the story, if there be one," said Norwood.

"Well, tell us what you do know," persisted the young lady.

"The man who owns and occupies this palace in the desert is named Elfinstar—Theobald Elfinstar, if we are to believe common rumor. He arrived in the colony about three years ago, with no wife or family, a few English servants, and plenty of money. He selected that plateau below us and built that house."

"Why on earth should a man of means have chosen such an extraordinary and apparently inaccessible site for his dwelling place, when there are so many beautiful situations in the valleys and along the banks of the Derwent?" inquired Belle Isle.

"No human being can tell. Yet you cannot deny the

paradisaical beauty of the place, nor the unequaled grandeur of the prospect," replied Norwood.

"But how in the name of magic could the building materials have been conveyed thither? The whole thing looks to me like necromancy."

"There was a pass from the foot of the mountain to that plateau. It was narrow and tortuous, but Elfinstar hired convict labor and had the pass graded into a practical road, before the foundations of the house were laid. Everything was carried up by that road."

"Does the interior of the house correspond with the exterior in magnificence and splendor?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle.

"No human being outside of it knows for a certainty, except perhaps the convict workmen who assisted in carrying up and unpacking the furniture. Rumor says that all the Arabian Nights stories of oriental gorgeousness are outshone within the walls of that white palace; but no visitor has ever been admitted to its sanctuary to report its hidden glories."

"And do you mean to say that the inmates live there in solitude?" inquired Mrs. Rhodes.

"Inmates cannot be said to live in solitude, for its members have the society of each other; but they live in absolute retirement from the world—in the sumptuous, luxurious retirement of an oriental *seraglio*."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Rhodes, as if suddenly recollecting herself. "The enchanted princess—what about her? You said that there was only the man and his servants came to the colony."

"Oh, yes; the sleeping beauty in the wood. Well, my dear Miss Rhodes, there is said to be a young lady, beautiful as an houri, living in that paradise—but—really,

"Whether she be dark or bright,
Or little loved, or loved aright,"

I am sure I cannot tell you," laughed the young ensign.

"But do the people hold no communication whatever with the outside world?" inquired Mr. Rhodes.

"None whatever—with the one exception that proves the rule. That is, once a week, when the mail ships come in,

a manservant, whose name is said to be Stackpole, comes down into the town, mails and receives letters from the post offices, and sometimes parcels from the ship, or purchases goods in the town, and returns. But neither the master or mistress of the house, the young lady, or any other person from the hermitage is ever seen abroad!"

"But do tell us more about the young lady, the enchanted princess, the sleeping beauty, as you call her," persisted Miss Rhodes.

"Really, I have told you all that I can gather either of facts or theories. If I had any imagination, I might make up a satisfactory story about her; but that might not be satisfactory," laughed the young ensign.

"No, that would not be satisfactory. I have a child's longing for a story, but with a child's stipulation that it shall be 'true.'"

While they spoke, the Rev. Mr. Rhodes was looking up at the sky, and now he said:

"The sun is getting low, my friends; had we not better turn our horses' heads homeward?"

"Oh, yes!" chimed in his wife. "I would not be out in this wild country after dark for the whole world! If all is true that is said about the bushmen, it would be very unsafe."

The two young girls agreed with her, and the two young men had nothing to do but to acquiesce.

They turned about and descended the tortuous mountain pass—winding in and out, and up and down, for nearly two hours, before they came out at the base of the mountain.

The sun was little more than an hour high, and they had several miles' ride before them. But their horses had had a good rest at noon, and also while they paused upon the plateau, and they had come at a walking gait through the mountain pass, so that they could be put to a good speed on their return road.

It was dusk when the party reached the barracks.

Isoline, being fatigued with her day's ride, left her husband in the courtyard and went at once to her room.

There a surprise awaited her.

Lona Pond sat on a low hassock, pale as death and bathed in tears.

"My dear girl! What is the matter? Have you heard any bad news?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle, as she threw off her riding cap and went to the weeping woman.

"Oh, madam, I have seen him! I have seen him!" exclaimed the latter, breaking into convulsive sobs.

"Seen whom?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle.

"Him!—my poor Ham!" gasped the girl.

"Gow, do you mean?" inquired the surprised lady.

"Oh, yes, madam! Ham Gow! My poor, poor, dear Ham!" sobbed Lona.

"But—I don't understand. Where have you seen Gow? And why are you so deeply distressed about it?"

"Oh, madam—when I went out walking—this morning—after my work was done—I saw him—Ham Gow—in the chain gang—breaking stones on the road!" gasped the girl, amid suffocating sobs and tears.

"A convict!" exclaimed the horrified lady.

"Oh, yes, madam, a convict, and—my heart will break!" wailed the unhappy girl.

CHAPTER XVI

HAM GOW AGAIN

"HAM Gow a convict in the chain gang on these roads!" exclaimed Mrs. Belle Isle, with a start of incredulous amazement.

"Oh, yes, madam! yes! I saw him, I say! I saw him, and my heart is broken!" wailed Lona Pond, wringing her hands.

"But this is quite impossible, my poor girl! You could not have seen him! You were certainly mistaken. It must have been some one else whom you took for him," said her mistress, speaking with confidence.

"Oh, my dear mistress! As if I did not know my own dear friend, Ham Gow! As if I could possibly mistake any other man for him!" moaned Lona.

"But, my dear girl, consider! When we left England, some months ago, Gow had not been arrested, though there were warrants out against him in all directions, and

large sums offered for his apprehension. How, then, could he have been publicly tried for any offense, and convicted and sent hither without being identified and arraigned upon a much graver charge which might have sent him to the scaffold, or without our hearing all about it?"

"Oh, madam, I do not know how it could have been, but I know it has been done; for I stood this afternoon face to face with him in the chain gang on the road," persisted the miserable sweetheart of the tramp.

"Lona! I am sorry you went near the chain gang! It was no place for you to go. But I do not mean to reproach you, child. Tell me, circumstantially, how you came to walk in that direction, and meet, or think you met, your lover among the convicts at work on the road," said Mrs. Belle Isle.

"Oh, madam, after you had gone away this morning, and I had got through all my work, I felt lonesome and down-hearted, so I put on my bonnet and shawl and walked into the town, and beyond the town out on Macquarrie Road, and almost before I knew it, I came upon the chain gang of convicts in their yellow uniform, breaking stones on the road, and half a dozen or so of mounted constables, with carbines, watching them. While I stopped and stared, uncertain whether to turn back or go past the whole gang, one of them raised his head, and—I liked to have dropped dead on the spot where I stood, for it was Ham Gow!"

"Impossible, Lona! It was some one else who looked like Gow!"

"Oh, no, madam, it was no one else; it was Ham Gow!"

"Did he recognize you?"

"I do not know, madam, for the minute he looked up, one of the constables struck him over the head and cursed him——"

"The brute!" interjected Isoline.

"And he dropped his eyes on his hammer and never lifted them again.

"I forgot myself and cried out to him, 'Ham! Oh, Ham!' ever so many times! But he took no notice, and that constable, or whatever he was—he who struck Ham over the head—ordered me to be off with myself if I did not want to be sent to the house of correction! And I came home, and I have been crying ever since! Oh,

madam, it is but little good I am to you now! You might as well turn me off and send me home."

"Do you wish to leave me and return to England, Lona?"

"Oh, no, madam, I do not wish to leave you; you are the only hope I have in this world! But I am a trouble to you, and so perhaps you had better send me away."

"I do not wish to send you away, Lona, unless you desire to go."

"Oh, no, ma'am, I have told you that I do not wish to leave you, of myself; and even if you should turn me away—which no one would wonder at your doing, miserable girl that I am—I should not return to the old country!—not while my poor Ham is out here! I would stay here where I could see him sometimes, if it was only at a distance! I have no one to go to England for, ma'am! All I have are here! Oh, ma'am! Could I do anything for poor Ham? Would they let me see him to speak to him? Would they let me take him tobacco and books, do you think? But, oh, ma'am! perhaps you would not like to keep a girl who was on speaking terms with a convict?"

"Lona, child, I do not know the prison rules, and cannot tell whether you would be allowed to visit and help a prisoner or not; but I do know it would be your duty and mine, and every Christian's, to do all that we can, or that we may be permitted to do, for the souls and bodies of these poor outcasts of society," said the lady, gently.

"Then you would not object to my going to see Ham in his prison, and taking him things?"

"Certainly I should not, Lona! But really I do not think the man you saw was Gow, but some one like him."

"Oh, madam, as if I did not know my own young man! Besides, Ham had not a common face, that any other man should look like him!"

"Yet, Lona, other men did look like him! So much like him as to be taken for him. Do you not remember the confusion caused by the contradictory reports brought in about the places Haw Gow was seen at on the same morning by people who were equally well acquainted with the tramp's personal appearance?"

"The three Ham Gows! Oh, yes!" replied the girl, with a wan smile.

"The fishermen, Abbot, Miller and Johnson, all 'good men and true,' who had known Gow from his boyhood, testified that on the morning of the murder they had taken him in their boat, off Hawkeville, and sailed with him for the coast of France, where, a few days later, they left him!"

"Yes, I know they said so; but they were mistaken."

"So thought the Rev. Paul Traverse, a gentleman of unimpeachable veracity, who had been Gow's Sunday-school and Bible class teacher for many years, and who knew him intimately, and yet testified that on the morning of the murder he had got on the same train with Ham Gow and ridden by his side from Hawkeville to London, conversing with him all the way, and that on reaching London he had accompanied Gow to the East India Docks and seen him on board the emigrant transport ship, the *Golden Path*, bound for Melbourne, Australia!"

"Yes, I know; but he was equally mistaken with the fishermen," said Lona, with a strange smile.

"And so said and swore the Hawkeville surgeon, Dr. Ellis, 'whose word is as good as his bond,' and who declared, two weeks later, that on coming from a night visit to a patient, he, early in the morning, encountered Ham Gow in the neighborhood of Stony Fells, our old home, recognized the young man, whom he had known familiarly from babyhood, and challenged him to surrender in the name of the queen, but only got laughed at for his pains. Then he gave chase to the fugitive, who took to the thick woods, whither the doctor's horse could not follow him, and so escaped. Now, Dr. Ellis is just as confident as the others that he encountered the real Ham Gow!"

"Deadly sure, madam, for I saw the meeting and the escape! Besides, dear madam, all the world may be mistaken in a man, except his sweetheart; but she cannot be!"

"It may be true, then, that this man whom you saw in the chain gang on the road is your lover. He may have got into trouble over here, and be suffering under a colonial sentence," murmured Isoline, sadly.

"Oh, madam, if you could only get the master to inquire into it, and let me know!" pleaded the girl, with hands clasped and eyes lifted as in prayer.

"I will certainly do so, Lona. And if the man should

prove to be Ham Gow, whom we all knew at home, and if the crime for which he has been condemned to penal servitude is not a very heinous one, we might get him taken off the chain gang and assigned to private service. We might take him into our own as butler or coachman."

"Oh, madam! If you could do that!" exclaimed the girl, as the shadow of despair passed over her face. "For," oh!" she added, after a few moments, "I know, I know that my poor boy could never have been guilty of any offense that should have condemned him to such a fate!"

"I hope not. And in any case, you know that in this colony there are opportunities of reform and redemption that do not occur in the old country, or in any other part of the world, that I ever heard of. In Great Britain, and in other countries, a man once convicted of crime and condemned to imprisonment and penal servitude, is lost beyond all redemption in this world, whatever may be his opportunities of salvation in the next."

"Oh! I know it, madam!" sighed the girl.

"But here it is different. A convict need not be without hope of redeeming his character; for good conduct he can be assigned to private service, where his position will be that of a domestic. If he continues to behave well he gets a ticket-of-leave, and can work for himself. Later on he can get a conditional pardon, which, with the exception of privilege to leave the colony, is equivalent to a full pardon."

"That is all new to me, dear madam."

"Is it? Why, Lona, some of the most prosperous, some of the wealthy and esteemed men in the colony have been convicts who have, with the help of the Lord, redeemed themselves. There is a dark side to this fair picture, of course. The convict, instead of redeeming himself, and rising higher and higher into prosperity and respectability, may fall deeper and deeper into degradation and misery, and finish his career as an underground beast of burden in the coal mines of Port Arthur, or amid the horrors of that prison isle which is the ultimate dread of all felons."

"Oh! madam!" cried the girl, with a shudder. "Oh! speak to the master! Oh! plead with him to try to save Ham Gow from such a fate! To stop him in that down-

ward road! To turn him about so that he may come up again!"

"I will do my very best, and so will Mr. Belle Isle, I know. We will even speak to the governor, if necessary. But, great heavens! my girl," suddenly exclaimed the lady, breaking off from her discourse.

"Madam?" questioned Lona, in surprise.

"Only a passing thought. I will speak to Mr. Belle Isle," replied the lady, recollecting and composing herself, as she arose and took off her riding gear and gave it to her maid, with directions to bring her a certain silk dress for her evening wear.

But Mrs. Belle Isle's passing thought was this: That she and her maid had both, in their eagerness to redeem Ham Gow, forgotten that it was dangerous to call public attention to him, against whom there was a charge of murder, of which, if he were convicted, he would assuredly be executed.

If the man seen in the chain gang were really Ham Gow, as Lona supposed, he could not be there under his real name, else he certainly would have been long ago arrested for the murder of the Earl of Hawkewood.

He must be there known by some other name, under which he had been convicted for some minor offense. And if so, it would be fatal to him to call public attention to his identity.

He might be convicted by circumstantial evidence, and executed for a crime that he had never committed.

Isoline was perplexed.

Finally she resolved to be guided by the counsel of her husband, to whom, according to her promise, she meant to speak in behalf of the convict.

With the assistance of Lona Pond, she finished dressing, and went down to the parlor, where she was soon joined by the lieutenant.

She said nothing to him then of the subject that engaged her thoughts, for dinner was ready.

The young pair supped *tête-à-tête*, as they usually did.

Afterwards, when they were alone together in the parlor, Isoline quietly asked the lieutenant if he remembered Ham Gow, the Hawkeville tramp.

"As if I should be likely to forget him! The gentle-

man vagabond! The poor wretch who was falsely charged with the murder of his patron and only friend, the Earl of Hawkewood! To be sure I remember him!" said Cosmo Belle Isle.

"Then you do believe he was falsely accused?" exclaimed Isoline, eagerly looking into his face.

"Of course I do! I felt sure that he was guiltless of that crime even before I heard Volante's statement of what she witnessed in the bachelors' corridor that night, and which ought to have settled the question forever as far as poor Gow was concerned. It was a shame that the warrants for his arrest, which had been scattered all over the world, were not withdrawn after the statement of Lady Volante had been made public! Poor wretch! He had grown up among us and had not a vice in the world, so far as anyone ever knew, except his hatred of restraint and love of locomotion—if they could be called vices."

"I am really glad to hear you say this, Cosmo, because—because I have quite a difficult problem to solve now in regard to Ham Gow, and I want your advice and assistance."

"Ham Gow? Why, what do you know of him at present, Isa?"

"He is said to be here in this colony," replied the lady, in a hesitating manner, for she shrank from telling where exactly the poor tramp was thought to be.

"Here in this colony? What is he doing here?" abruptly inquired the lieutenant.

"He is said to be—working on the new road," slowly replied the lady.

"Working on the new road! Why, none but the convicts—and the worst of the convicts—work there in chain gangs," exclaimed Mr. Belle Isle.

"I know—he is said to be among them," replied Isoline in a voice so low that it was almost inaudible.

"A felon!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"So it is said."

"Who says it?"

"My maid."

"Lona Pond?"

"Yes."

"My dearest Isa, how should she know anything about it?"

"She took a walk while we were out to-day, and strayed into the new road and came upon the chain gang, among whom she saw and recognized Ham Gow, notwithstanding his cropped hair and his yellow prison garb. She had known him ever since she first came to Hawkeville, when she was but ten years old. They were—engaged to each other."

"What a complication! Is it not possible she may be mistaken?"

"Quite possible. So, Cosmo, dear, this is what I want you to do: inspect that chain gang. See if there be any convict among them closely resembling Ham Gow, and find out all about him—what is his name, and where his native place, what is his crime, and how long his term of servitude."

"I will do so, Isoline, for the interest I feel in the poor fellow, as well as for your sake. But I really do not think this felon in the chain gang can be Ham Gow. It is difficult to imagine that merry, easy-going vagrant doing anything so serious as to bring him under the ban of the law."

And with this the lieutenant struck a fusee, lighted his cigar and walked out into the garden attached to their quarters to smoke.

Isoline was very much fatigued with her day's excursion, and soon retired to bed—not, however, before she had informed Lona Pond, who attended her night toilet, that she had spoken to Lieut. Belle Isle in favor of the convict supposed to Ham Gow, and that the lieutenant had promised promptly to interest himself in the case.

With this gleam of hope the poor, faithful betrothed of Ham Gow retired to her cot.

CHAPTER XVII

"NO. 4444"

THE next day was an anxious one for the mistress and the maid.

Lieut. Belle Isle was on duty all the forenoon. In the afternoon, however, he went out on his errand of mercy. He was gone two hours, and returned with the result of his quest. It might be deemed satisfactory according to the manner in which those most concerned might take it.

Isola ran to meet him, drew him into the parlor, sat down with him on the sofa, and besought him to tell her "everything at once!"

"As if I, or any other human being could do that!" laughed the lieutenant. "But I can tell you in sequence," he added.

"First of all, then, was the man in question Ham Gow?" she eagerly demanded.

"First of all, then, the man in question was not Ham Gow," laughed Cosmo.

"I thought so. Well?"

"But he was enough like the worthy Ham to have deceived his own mother—if he ever had one!"

"Tell me about it."

"If you will permit me! I went out this afternoon on something of a wild-geese chase to look after a convict of whose name, nativity, offense and term of servitude I was totally ignorant, and having no more clue to the fellow than that of his reported resemblance to the estimable Mr. Gow, of Demondike. Well, my dear, I went out upon the road and walked up one side and down the other, scanning the faces of the convicts as they squatted upon the ground in their yellow uniforms, with their piles of stone between their knees and their breaking hammers in their hands, cracking away at their work. Their ankles were fettered, my dear, and a chain was passed from one fetter to another along the whole gang, so that there was no escape for the workers, even although they were on the highroad, with an open country immediately around and a mountain wilderness beyond, and they were guarded only by half a dozen keepers."

Isoline shuddered.

"I walked along the line, up on one side and down the other—the keepers touching their hats to my uniform—taking me, perhaps for a special inspector sent by the superintendent—until I came abreast of a man whose presence made me start."

"The man Lona Pond saw?"

"He must have been. In spite of his disfiguring cropped hair and convict jacket, he was such a counterpart of Ham Gow that I was for the moment convinced that our poor tramp was before me."

"Oh, Cosmo!" interjected Isoline.

"'I wish to speak to that man,' I said the keeper nearest at hand.

"'All right, sir,' he replied, touching his hat.

"Then I went up to the fellow, and—I assure you, Isoline, that I spoke to the man with as much diffidence as I could have felt in addressing Field Marshal His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge himself."

"I can understand that. You felt as if you were unjustifiably intruding upon the poor soul, in his degradation and misery, or that he might think so, without being able to defend himself."

"Something like that. Well, I asked him:

"'What is your name, my man?'"

"'What is that to you?' he growled, turning up to me a face deformed by rage, out of all likeness to our gay Ham Gow, and into that of a frowning demon.

"I was startled, but presently composed myself and said:

"'I took you for a man I once knew in the old country—Mr. Gow.'"

"'Mr. ———!' roared the scowling ruffian, and he brought his hammer down with a force that sent the fragments of stone flying about like shot from an exploded bombshell.

"'Best let the brute alone, sir. He be one of the worst in the whole lot,' said the keeper to me.

"'What is the fellow's name?' I inquired, when I had drawn the keeper a little out of hearing.

"'He is No. 4444, and about the hardest case we have in the colony, sir. He is safe to go to Port Arthur next weeding out of the convicts.'"

"'But about his name and his crime?' I inquired.

"'No. 4444, and a bad lot, sir! That is all I know of him. If you want to find out more, you can inquire at the office of the superintendent of convicts, sir.'

"I thanked the civil keeper and turned my steps toward Macquarrie Street, and went to the office of the superin-

tendent. It joins the prisoners' barracks. I found a civil clerk, who, however, knew no more of felon No. 4444 than I did until we searched the records. His was a very bad one."

"What was it?" breathed Isoline, who had been depressed into partial stupor by this sketch of convict life.

"His name was Jack Hice, aged twenty-five, nativity London, an old offender, had been transported for burglary when he was but sixteen years of age, had served out his full term of seven years and returned about two years ago, was arrested within a few months after for an aggravated burglary and assault with intent to kill, and after trial and conviction sent back here for twenty years. His name is down to be sent with the next gang to the coal mines at Port Arthur."

"Well!" breathed Isoline, with a great sigh of relief. "I am glad he is not Ham Gow. I will go and tell Lona."

And she went to her room and rang for her maid.

The girl hastened in, all on fire with expectancy.

"Well, Lona, you may set your heart at rest. The convict you saw was not Ham Gow."

"Oh, madam! Pardon me for differing with you, but indeed, he was!" said the girl, mournfully shaking her head.

"Child! Mr. Belle Isle saw the man and spoke with him and his keepers. He bears another name—Jack Hice," patiently replied the lady.

"So he may, ma'am. He maybe took that name to hide his own and save himself from being arrested on that other false charge; but he's Ham Gow all the same!"

"Lona," inquired Mrs. Belle Isle, with a spice of humor in her manner—"do you want that convict to be Ham Gow?"

"Oh, madam!" said the maid, in an involuntary tone of reproach.

"Well, then don't insist upon making him so! He is not Ham Gow, however strongly he may resemble him. He is an old convict, though a young man. Listen!"

And the lady gave the girl the record of Jack Hice as the lieutenant had received it from the prison authorities.

This information should have convinced the girl, but it did not.

"The master may have spoken to the wrong man, not the one I saw," said the incorrigible creature.

"But, my dear child, he spoke to the only one in the gang who bore a likeness to Ham Gow, and this Hice bore such a likeness to Gow that Mr. Belle Isle himself was surprised into a momentary belief that he was Gow; but this opinion was soon dissipated by investigation into the man's record, as I have told you. Do be persuaded of the truth, Lona, so that your mind may be at rest," pleaded the lady.

"That is what I wish for most, dear madam, to feel convinced of the truth. Is there any objection to a friend going to see a prisoner?"

"I—do not know. But of course, I suppose there are days when near relatives and friends of convicts may be permitted to see them. Do you wish to visit this doubtful man, Lona?" inquired Mrs. Belle Isle.

"Oh, yes, madam, if you please. I wish to see and speak with him. To see and hear with my own eyes and ears whether he is Ham Gow or another. Could I do so, dear madam?"

"I am thinking. It is a terrible place for you to go to—the convicts' barracks—and that man is a horrible ruffian!"

"If he is Ham Gow he would not want to injure me; and if he is anybody else I should not be afraid of him—he could not hurt me, with the guards around. Oh, ma'am, let me go!" pleaded the girl, with clasped hands.

"I am thinking how it could be arranged with propriety for you, Lona; for you are going to see a stranger, and not your friend, as you suppose him to be."

"Oh, madam, let me go!" persisted Lona.

"Since nothing else will satisfy you, I suppose you must be permitted to do so. Let me see. The chaplain visits the prisoners frequently; I will get Mr. Belle Isle to speak to the chaplain and ask him to take you with him to see Hice on Sunday between services, when the convicts will be in their cells. That will be the best way, I think."

"Oh, thank you, madam, thank you," said the girl, raising and kissing the hand of her mistress.

"There, child, go and say your prayers and go to bed," said Mrs. Belle Isle, kindly.

"Good-night, madam."

"Good-night, Lona."

The next day was Saturday. Mrs. Belle Isle, with a laughing apology for troubling him so much with the love affairs of her maid, spoke to the lieutenant in regard to the projected visit of Lona to the prison, and inquired if the chaplain could be induced to take her.

Mr. Belle Isle replied that he thought so, and would see to it in the course of the day.

"But it is very strange that idiot can't be brought to listen to reason!" he concluded, somewhat impatiently.

"Don't be harsh with her, Cosmo. She wants to see for herself. When once she has done so she will be contented," pleaded Isoline.

"I hope so," said Cosmo, with a shrug of his shoulders.

That afternoon the lieutenant happened to meet the chaplain in the purser's store, and mentioned to him the wish of Lona Pond.

The reverend gentleman willingly agreed to take the girl to the cell of Hice.

"I hope the young woman will find that she has been mistaken in supposing that this man is anyone she ever met before. He is a fearful ruffian—one who 'fears not God, neither regards man'; one 'whose hand is against every man,' thus compelling 'every man's hand to be against him,'" concluded the Rev. Mr. Heron, chaplain of the convicts' barracks.

Lona Pond was pleased with the news that she was to be taken by a minister to visit the convict.

She attended church on Sunday forenoon, and after service she walked to the prison, where she was met by the chaplain, who conducted her through the gates and past the various guards and sentries into the long, low building, and to the cell on the ground floor that was occupied by No. 4444. They had approached the cell so softly that the prisoner, seated on the side of his narrow bed, behind the grated door, did not perceive the intruders.

Lona Pond gazed upon him as he sat quietly there, with his brawny arms folded across his ample chest, his short-cropped head bowed upon it.

"Hice!" cried the chaplain, to call his attention.

What an instantaneous and terrible change!

The convict started at the chaplain's voice, and his sullen face became transformed into that of a wild beast.

"What do you want?" he demanded, with a volley of oaths that made the girl clap her hands to her ears in self-defense.

"This young woman has come to see you, thinking that you are one whom she once knew in England," said the chaplain, as soon as the torrent of profanity had expended itself and he had an opportunity to speak again.

The caged ruffian glared at the pair as if he would have liked to tear them limb from limb.

"You and your young woman may go to ——!" roared the demoniac, with another volley of blasphemy and obscenity that made even the jail chaplain's hair rise on his head and sent the girl shuddering and running down the corridor.

The chaplain went after her and overtook her at the outer door, where she stood trembling.

"He is not the man you expected to find?" said the reverend gentleman, as he joined her.

"Oh, no, no, no, sir! The likeness, when the man is quiet, is very, very striking; but as soon as he is roused it disappears. I saw him, this man Hice, first by accident in the chain gang, and I thought he was my old friend and neighbor, Ham Gow, whom I had known nearly all my life at Hawkeville, in Cornwall, England; and, oh, sir, I knew, if he had been Ham Gow, he was unjustly condemned, for he—Ham—was quite incapable of committing a crime! But now that I have seen this man closely, face to face, and heard him, I am satisfied that he is not my own old friend," Lona Pond explained, as she walked beside the chaplain through the prison yard.

"I am glad to hear you say so, my girl. Now go quickly home to your mistress. These streets are not the best places for a young person to be walking through alone," said the chaplain, as he parted from Lona Pond on the sidewalk.

She hastened on to the barracks and to her mistress' quarters, and gladdened the heart of that lady by assuring her that she was now fully convinced that Jack Hice was not Ham Gow.

"And in regard to Ham Gow, Lona, you must try to be patient. You told me that your motive in coming out to

the colonies was the hope of finding him here—a forlorn hope at the best, my poor girl, as I explained to you; for even if there were a chance of your meeting him in this large place and scattered population, he could scarcely permit himself to be recognized, even by you. He is in hiding somewhere, probably under an assumed name, and he must remain in hiding until the real murderer of the Earl of Hawkewood is discovered and himself freed from the charge of that crime.”

“But never to hear from him, madam!” sighed the girl.

“It is hard! But you must hope. He will probably write to his friends at Demondike. You can write to them and inquire for news of him, you know.”

“Yes, ma’am, I can do that, but—Old Nan Crook, nor young Nan, either, ever goes to the post office! My letter might lie there forever uncalled for!”

“Inclose it in one to the Rev. Dr. Vincent, with a request that he will have it sent to the Ruined Tower. It would be sure to reach Old Nan then.”

“Yes, madam, and it might put her up to inquiring at the post office for other letters, and so get any that may be waiting there for her from Ham Gow! I will write to-morrow, ma’am, and send my letter by the ship that is to sail on Wednesday.”

“That is right,” said the lady, as she arose to prepare for the afternoon church service.

The next day, Monday, Mr. and Mrs. Belle Isle were engaged to lunch with the Viscount and Viscountess Seyres.

They went early and found Lord and Lady Seyres alone. The viscountess had not recovered her spirits. It is probable she never could get over the memory of her error and the humiliation of its discovery. This was the punishment that neither the mercy of God nor man would avert while she lived in this world.

As the four sat together Leut. Belle Isle related, for Lady Seyres’ amusement, the episode of the accidental meeting between the girl Lona Pond and the convict Jack Hice, who bore so strong a resemblance to Ham Gow, and gave a short sketch of the notorious felon’s history.

In the midst of his relation, Lady Seyres suddenly started, and said:

"This man Hice, who is said to be the very counterpart of Gow, seems to have been in England at the very time of the mysterious assassination of the Earl of Hawkewood, after which you may remember, when Gow was charged with the crime, and warrants were issued and rewards were offered for his apprehension, there were three distinct and equally reliable, though totally irreconcilable accounts of his whereabouts—one, that he had crossed over to France; one, that he had sailed from London Docks for Australia; and one, that he was still lurking in the neighborhood of Hawkeville."

"Yes, of course we remember that; but what deduction does your ladyship draw from it?" inquired Mr. Belle Isle, while Isoline looked deeply interested, and the viscount inquisitive—for the latter was not as well posted in the details of the homicide at Hawke Hall as were the other three persons present.

"What inference do I draw? Why, this one—that the man Hice was in the neighborhood of Hawkeville; that he might have been the assassin of the Earl of Hawkewood, and that he was mistaken for Gow by one of the persons who professed to have seen the latter," said Lady Seyres.

Her words produced a profound impression upon all present.

The discovery of the murderer of the Earl of Hawkewood had been the subject of the most anxious solicitude to all concerned for nearly two years past; for since the statement of Lady Volante Belle Isle in regard to what she had witnessed in the bachelors' corridor on the night of the murder had been made public, few, if anyone, believed in the guilt of Gow, although the warrant issued and rewards offered for his apprehension had not been withdrawn.

Mr. Belle Isle was the first to break the thoughtful silence that followed Lady Seyres' suggestion.

"This theory had not occurred to me. Your ladyship has certainly found a clue to the mystery of that murder. I shall lose no time in writing to Scotland Yard to have this clue followed up. If we can bring the crime home to this man Hice he will be sent back to England for trial, we shall get rid of an 'ugly customer,' and an innocent man will be freed from the suspicion of guilt."

"Oh, Heaven grant that we could discover the real criminal, that the guiltless might cease to suffer!" murmured Isoline, clasping her hands in the earnestness of her feelings.

The conversation changed.

"Cosmo," said the viscountess, "now that you have come into so large a fortune, I wonder you do not resign from the army."

"No, dear ma'am, I cannot resign now. I have but recently received my commission, and my regiment is quartered here, at, perhaps, the most undesirable military station in the world; but, upon this very account, it is a point of honor for me not to resign. What do you think, sir?" inquired the young lieutenant, turning to the viscount.

"I think you are perfectly right, Belle Isle. And let me add, that I am very glad that your sense of honor, which detains you at your post of duty, also keeps you near us, so that we enjoy your society," replied the viscount, with a genial smile, as he turned and bowed to Isoline, as if to include her in his compliment.

"You are very kind to say so," answered the lieutenant, warmly.

"And, besides, mamma, you know that Cosmo and myself are too happy to be near you and papa," added Isoline, with a fond glance toward Lord Seyres, whom she had learned to love and honor above all mankind, except her own husband.

"I thank you, my dear child. Believe me that we also hold

'Your blooming life
A part of our life's joy,'"

said the viscount, quoting the lines as he laid his hand caressingly on the head of his stepdaughter.

Luncheon was then announced.

Lady Seyres arose and took the arm of Lieut. Belle Isle, and led the way to the dining room.

Lord Seyres offered his to Mrs. Belle Isle, and followed.

The four sat down to a round table adorned with an elegant service of Bohemian porcelain, and supplied with a dainty repast.

The luncheon was an enjoyable affair, and the party

lingered rather long at the table toying with the delicious tropical fruits that formed its last course, and talking on the same topics that had engaged their attention in the drawing room.

Soon after leaving the table, however, Mr. and Mrs. Belle Isle made their adieux and departed.

As they drove through Macquarrie Street a general commotion attracted their attention.

"What is up?" inquired Mr. Belle Isle of his coachman, when he had pulled the checkstring and stopped the carriage.

"They are saying that a prisoner has escaped, sir," returned the man.

"Oh! Go on," ordered his master. The escape of a prisoner more or less was not a matter of such moment as to interest Cosmo Belle Isle.

As soon as they reached their quarters in the barracks the lieutenant shut himself up in the little room where he kept his books and stationery, to write a letter to the chief of police at Scotland Yard, requesting him to follow up the clue suggested by Lady Seyres.

When he had finished his task he came out to post his letter, and was met by a startling piece of news.

It was no ordinary malefactor who had broken his chains, but the ferocious man-demon, Hice, whose name was a terror to all who had ever heard of him.

This escape actually spread a panic over the female portion of the community, as if a great Numidian lion, in a state of hydrophobia, had broken loose and was roaming at large through their neighborhood.

Not a woman would venture out to walk, ride, or drive beyond the city's limits until the fugitive monster should be recaptured.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FUGITIVE

WE have left the Countess of Hawkewood only half reconciled to her husband, awaiting the advent of her heir at Hawke Hall, in Cornwall; and we have left Old Nan Crook

hoarding her ill-gotten money and quarreling with her daughter at the Ruined Tower of Demondike; and now we must leave the Viscountess Seyres mentally and spiritually expiating her offenses in the presence of the pure-hearted and noble-minded man who had loved and trusted her sufficiently to make her his wife, and whose very forbearance to reproach her she felt as her deepest reproach; and Mr. and Mrs. Belle Isle enjoying their protracted honeymoon at his post of duty, and poor Lona Pond bewailing her lost lover—all these last-mentioned people being at the antipodes; and we must go after one of the lost men of our story, Ham Gow, the ubiquitous, who was seen and sworn to, at three several places, when, according to the laws of nature, he could only have been at one.

We, however, already know that when the honest fishermen swore to have started with him for the coast of France on the very morning of the murder, and the equally honest clergyman testified to having ridden with him to London that same morning, and seen him off to Australia that same day—Ham Gow, the real, original article, could neither have been leaving the country by the channel nor by the ocean, since only a few hours later he appeared at the Ruined Tower by Demondike, with a broken head!

We have seen how safely he was hidden in the smugglers' secret cave, and how skillfully he was nursed by Old Nan Crook, until the false clues, supposed to have been true ones, given by the fishermen and the clergyman, drew the attention of the police from the Ruined Tower and gave him time and opportunity to escape.

Then Old Nan Crook had favored his flight by *La Belle Femme*—"The Pretty Woman"—a smuggling craft commanded by Capt. Pierre Moreau, trading—free trading—between the coasts of France and England and the West Indies.

La Belle Femme was at that time lying off Demondike, waiting to land a cargo of St. Croix rum and Havana cigars, and to take off a cargo of Paisley shawls and Sheffield cutlery, which lay hidden in the smugglers' cave, ready for export.

La Belle Femme was going to the West Indies, and Old Nan Crook strongly counseled Ham to go along with the skipper.

But there was something in the poor tramp's nature—perhaps some inherited sense of honor—that had always prevented him, on the one hand, from connecting himself in any way with the smugglers, and, on the other, from betraying them to the authorities.

Ham Gow, the constitutional tramp, who could never rest long in any one place, and never be happy unless he was, as he expressed it, "on the go," was heartily tired of his seclusion in the smugglers' cave.

He longed for liberty, and now that the opportunity had come, he was resolved to escape—not by the smugglers' craft, however. He would derive no benefit of any sort from the smugglers.

He was determined to trust to his own wit and his own limbs to make good his exit from England.

He did not mean to confide his plans to either of the Nans. He knew that to do so would provoke a storm of opposition and of argument, and Ham never could bear to argue with the two Nans, or with any other women, for that matter; so he made up his mind to avoid all fuss by stealing off quietly from the cave and from the Ruined Tower.

It must be recalled to memory that on the first night after the withdrawal of the police from the tower, Young Nan had come down from the strong room through the secret passage to the smugglers' cave, where Ham was still sequestered, and guarded by Old Nan, and had offered to relieve the crone of her watch and remain with the hidden man during the night, and that her offer had been eagerly accepted.

Old Nan had gone up to the comparative comforts and luxuries of the strong room in the Ruined Tower, and Young Nan had remained with the prisoner in the smugglers' cave.

The two had talked over the incidents of the "tragedy" at Hawke Hall, and Ham had displayed a levity of feeling over the homicide that had surprised and displeased Young Nan.

But his subsequent declaration—that he could not regard the affair seriously because he did not believe that the earl had ever been well murdered at all, but that he had only been half killed, and had come to himself on the cooling board,

as some supposed corpses had been known to do, and not liking the position, had walked off on his own legs—stolen his own body, in point of fact—had so stunned Young Nan that she had no power left in her for any other emotion but amazement.

Not that she believed the tramp's theory! If she could have believed it, she must have died of the shock. The mere idea presented to her mind was enough to overwhelm her.

She never made one word of comment, but just sat staring at him with open eyes and mouth until he brought his theory to a climax by saying:

"For if the earl didn't come to life and walk off with his own body, where is it?"

Then Nan spoke:

"Ham, you are such a fool that I don't think as I can trust you to leave the country without me. You'll be getting into some other scrape and come to some bad end, because you are such a fool!"

Gow laughed good-humoredly, and said it was bed-time, and that, as he could no longer call himself an invalid, he would leave the mattress and pillows to Nan, and take a blanket, and roll himself up at the other end of the cavern.

"Kiss me good-night, Nan," he said, as he was turning to walk away.

"Good-night, lad! God forgive us our many sins, and God save you, lad!" said Nan, with unusual tears in her eyes.

"You, too, Nan, and amen," said the tramp, as he turned away.

And five minutes later Ham Gow was fast asleep, and his snores could be heard all over the cavern.

Ham slept soundly until about three o'clock in the morning, when he awoke with a start.

"Blest if I hadn't nearly overslept myself," he said to himself, with a deep yawn. "And if Nan had woke up before me I should never have got off without a row," he added, as he arose and stretched himself.

As he had lain down in his clothes at night he did not need to dress himself in the morning; but he went to the subterranean stream at the end of the cavern and washed his face and head, dried them on one of the coarse crash

towels that had been brought from the tower, and, lastly, crept up to the mattress and looked over the sleeping woman. And very heavy sleepers were both the Nans, Young Nan being the heaviest of the two.

"Heaven save her! she is the best of the whole lot, after all. I am glad she blessed me before she slept last night; for when she wakes I shall be beyond her blessing or her banning," murmured the tramp, under his breath.

"I wonder if I dare kiss her good-by again?" he breathed, looking regretfully on the sleeping face. "Most likely I shall never see her again. I'll risk it," he decided, as he cautiously knelt down beside the mattress, stooped over Nan's face, and softly touched her forehead with his lips.

Nan slightly stirred, and murmured in her dreams: "Poor, dear Ham!" and relapsed into profound slumber again.

Gow sighed deeply as he arose from his knees.

"It's no choice of mine, going this time, or this way. I am obliged to go," he muttered, as he made his way to the mouth of the secret passage leading from the cave to the crypt below the Ruined Tower.

He ascended to the cellar, crossed it, and rolled the stone away that concealed the entrance of the secret staircase, and went up that to the iron door that formed the back of the huge Dutch oven in the solid masonry of the chimney.

At length he emerged into the strong room, having closed the iron door behind him.

The early dawn was breaking in through the uncurtained window, and by its dim light he saw that Old Nan was sleeping soundly on her bed.

He went up and looked at her, murmuring:

"I owe you my life, old woman. Take my thanks, and my assurance that I will repay you, if we live to meet again."

He stooped and kissed Old Nan without in the least disturbing her repose.

Then he went about the room, gathering up certain of his own few personal effects, which he made into a bundle, together with a supply of bread, cheese, and cold beef, which he wrapped in paper before putting it among his clothes.

Next, he helped himself to a flask of brandy from Old

Nan's bottle, knowing full well that he would be welcome to the same, and put it into his coat pocket.

Finally, he took a few silver coins that he had hidden away in a crevice of the old wall, and with these in his vest pocket he lifted his bundle, put it on a stick, threw it over his shoulders, caught up a good soft felt hat—the property of Dennis Prout—from its hook, and put it on his head, sallied forth to make his escape, and to seek his fortune.

The vivid redness of the eastern horizon showed that the sun was near its rising.

But Ham Gow turned his steps westward toward Stony Fells, not taking the beaten track, but cutting across fields, dodging down lanes, breaking through thickets, and always keeping himself out of sight of early passengers.

He reached the barren promontory misnamed Stony Fells, and he prowled along under its gray garden walls, waiting to get a sight of his sweetheart—for Old Nan and Young Nan were both right in saying that Ham Gow would have risked his neck sooner than have left the country without having said farewell to Lona Pond.

He had not waited long before he saw her come out of the kitchen door, into the back yard to draw water from the well.

He looked cautiously around, and seeing no one else near, called her name softly:

“Lona, love.”

She heard, started, dropped her bucket, and looked around.

“Here I am.”

She saw him then and stared in terror.

“It is I! Your Ham! Don't you know me? Why, Lona!”

She ran toward him then, eagerly speaking under her breath.

“Oh, Ham, is it you? Is it indeed you? No! I didn't know you, at first! What have you been doing to yourself, Ham? You look so thin and white, and you have lost your long black hair and beard! Where have you been, Ham, dear? Some said you had gone to France, and some said you had sailed for Australia!”

"As if I would have gone anywhere, without first bidding you good-by, Lona!" he answered.

He had been speaking to her with his head just above the garden wall. Now he dropped down from his position, calling:

"Come out to me, love, since I cannot come in to you."

Lona passed swiftly through the back garden gate, closing it after her, and joined her lover on the outside.

They sat down on the pile of stone upon which Ham had been standing to look over the wall.

"Oh, Ham, Ham, it is dangerous for you to be here! Don't you know that there are warrants out and rewards offered for your arrest?" said the pale and trembling girl.

"Yes, my pond lily, I know all about it; but I do not think anybody will execute that warrant, or earn that reward, while I am sitting here, saying good-by to you! You never believed me capable of committing the crime I am accused of, Lona, did you?" gravely inquired the tramp.

"Who, I?" exclaimed the girl, in a tone of astonishment that set all his fears at once to rest.

"No, of course, I know you didn't! But, Lona, love, although I never did that murder and never could have done it, yet I am flying from justice as if I were a guilty man!" said Ham Gow, bitterly.

"I am thinking you are flying from injustice, rather," replied Lona Pond.

"You are right! So I am! I am flying from injustice. I should not get justice if I stayed here, nor should I fear it if I could get it! They say that in the eye of the law flight is a confession of guilt! But here I am, an innocent man, flying because I cannot prove my innocence, and because circumstantial evidence would be sure to prove me guilty in the face of truth! So I must ignominiously abscond, to save myself, or remain here to be innocently hanged! A fine alternative for an honest man!" laughed the tramp.

"Oh, Ham, dear, go, go! Much as I love to have you here, I feel what the risk is to you! Oh, go, Ham, go;" pleaded the terrified Lona.

"My girl, tell me the truth! Am I not greatly changed from what I was? Would any chance passenger be likely to recognize me at a glance? Tell me truly! I have not

risked such a contingency yet! But I may have to do so before I reach London."

Lona looked at him steadily for a few moments, and then said:

"No, Ham, I don't think anyone would. You are so changed, I did not know you at first myself. Your hair is cut close, your great black beard is shaven off, your shaggy eyebrows are clipped, your dark, sunburned complexion is bleached. To tell you the truth, Ham Gow, you look a deal more like the late young Earl of Hawkewood than you do like yourself!"

The tramp threw back his head and laughed long and merrily.

"There! that sounds like yourself! Your laugh and your voice and your eyes are like yourself, but nothing else! No one would know you from the printed description."

"The printed description!" echoed the tramp.

"Oh, yes, Ham, the printed description that shows you as you used to be, but is so unlike you as you are, that it is equal to a free pass out of the country!" exclaimed Lona Pond, laughing herself now at the idea.

"But—have you seen these printed descriptions?" inquired Gow, still in suspense.

"Oh, yes, indeed. They are up all over the country. The billstickers put up one right here on our garden wall. It was a damp day when they did it, and just as soon as their backs were turned I went and peeled it off the wall again before it was dry! I saved it. I can show it to you if you would like to look at it," said Lona, eagerly.

"Yes, I should," replied Gow.

Lona jumped up, sped through the garden gate, across the garden and into the house. She came running back with the paper in her hand.

"Say," said Ham Gow, "is there no one stirring in the house?"

"No, nor will not be for an hour yet! I have the brunt of the morning work."

"It is a shame you should have it!"

"Oh, no, it isn't! There's only me and my stepmother. I am young and she is old. It is right I should take the morning's work," said Lona Pond, cheerfully.

"Never mind, my dear! If I have not gone to Australia,

I am going there, and I mean to make my fortune by hook or by crook, so as to send for you and marry you and make a lady of you, as many a poor man has done by his sweetheart before me," said the tramp.

"Lord grant it, Ham, dear! But now listen while I read you this description, which was like enough to you a month ago, but see how it fits you now," said the girl. And sitting down on the pile of stones, with her back to the fence, she held out the broad poster between her two hands, and read as follows:

" 'TWO HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

" 'By order of the Lord Lieutenant of the county the above reward is hereby offered and will be given for the apprehension of Henri Delaplaine and Ham Gow, charged with the murder of the late Earl of Hawkewood. Said Henri Delaplaine——'

"But I'll skip all that and come to you," said Lona Pond, interrupting herself, as she passed the poster down through her hands and read on—with running comments:

" 'The same Ham Gow is of medium height and size'—You have fallen away so that you look rather tall and slim—'with a large head covered with a shock of long, black, coarsely curling hair.'—Your hair is cut so close that your head looks rather small than otherwise.—'He has a dark, ruddy, sunburned complexion, black, shaggy eyebrows, large, vigorous black eyes, and a very full and long black beard.'—You are as pale as a ghost, with lantern jaws, languid eyes, not much eyebrows to speak of, and no beard at all, only a pitiful, genteel little mustache on your upper lip.—'He wore, when last seen, an old wide-awake, brown felt hat, much battered, a coarse, gray blouse, travel-stained and torn, a pair of brown duck trousers, and leather-top boots, much broken.'

"Now, let us see! You have a natty little soft hat, a jacket and trousers of new navy-blue cloth, and a pair of neat shoes. I don't see the least resemblance between you and your printed description, Ham," said the girl, as she rolled up the poster.

"Neither do I!" exclaimed the tramp. "I think I shall be quite safe on the road, once I am out of this neighborhood."

"But where did you get that neat suit of clothes, Ham?"

Loaned me by Prout, the coast guardsman, though you needn't mention it, as it might injure the man if it were known that he befriended me."

"Of course it might."

"You see, this is a coast guardsman's dress, without the badges."

"Yes, I thought it was! Hush! Some one is calling!"

Some one was calling; It was Mrs. Pond, whose voice now rose to a shriek, screaming:

"Lona! Lona! Lona! Where are you, me gel?"

"Oh, I must go, or she will be out here after me and she will find you! And that would be ruin! Good-by! Good-by, dear Ham! I will think of you and love you always and pray for you every night and morning!"

"Good-by, love! Lona! Good-by! Good-by! I seem to leave my life in leaving you! But I will win a fortune for you and bring you out and marry you and make a lady of you, as I promise and vow! Good-by! Good-by!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOVERS' PARTING

THE lovers were locked for a moment in each other's arms and then broke suddenly asunder, as the girl turned and ran in to the gate to meet and stop her rushing step-mother, and the man donned his hat, shouldered his stick with the bundle at the end of it, and walked slowly off in the direction of the road, meaning to commence at once his tramp to London.

But before he reached the road, in crossing the field by a narrow private path, he came full tilt upon a horseman, whom he immediately recognized as Ellis, the village doctor.

Now, if there was one man in the whole community who would have recognized Ham Gow, under his present metamorphosis, that man was Dr. Ellis, who had tended the

tramp when he was a child and when he was a beardless youth through more than one spell of illness; so this pale, thin, languid-eyed, smooth-chinned aspect of the once stout, sunburned, black-bearded tramp was no unfamiliar one to Dr. Ellis.

He recognized Ham Gow at once, and the vagrant saw that he did.

"Gow! You are wanted! I command you, in the name of the queen, to give yourself up, here, now, to me!" exclaimed the doctor, pulling up his horse to a full stop.

The tramp regarded the doctor for a moment with an expression of quizzical mirth, and then he burst into a loud laugh, and demanded, derisively:

"How long have you been a bumbailie, doctor, and where is your warrant?"

The doctor jumped off his horse and made a rush to collar the tramp; but Gow, with a loud laugh, sprang aside and dashed into the thicket on his left, and, winding in and out through the trees, soon lost himself in its wilderness.

He heard the footsteps of the doctor breaking the brushwood in his unavailing search, which had at last to be given over.

The doctor found his way out, remounted his horse and rode on to Hawkeville police headquarters, and thence to Hawkewood Hall, to report the encounter.

Meanwhile Ham Gow, leaving the woods by an opposite exit, and taking lanes and bypaths, went on his weary way toward London.

No one molested him, no one suspected him. All who were after the reward were looking out for a robust, sunburned, black-bearded ruffian in tattered clothes, battered hat, and broken shoes, and they never could have identified, from such a description, the pale, thin, smooth-chinned, neatly dressed, languid young man who passed slowly along the highway, with his small bundle hanging on the stick thrown over his shoulder, and looking more like a poor gentleman student or a pedestrian artist than the "notorious murderer," Ham Gow.

So the "tramp" tramped on toward London in peace and safety; and the further he got from Hawkeville the more secure he felt.

Everywhere along his road he saw the posters pasted up

offering a reward for his arrest; but as the wanted man was so very unlike himself, he only laughed at them, repeating Lona Pond's words:

"They are 'as good as a free pass' for me."

He made thirty miles the first day, and slept under the weather side of a haystack at night. The second day he also made thirty, for he had been accustomed to long walks, and even at this time, when he was pale and thin from loss of flesh and blood, he was really very much stronger than he looked.

On his second night he slept under the sheltered side of a barn.

On the third day he made but twenty-five miles, and then, about dusk, finding himself near a lonely roadside inn of the humbler class, and feeling in need of something more supporting than stale bread and meat and cold water, which had been his traveling rations, and something more restful than the hard ground under the sheltered side of a haystack or barn wall, which for the last two nights had been his style of dormitory, and thinking that it might be perfectly safe to trust himself under the roof of a public house, he marched boldly on toward the inn.

It was a small, substantial house, irregularly built of stone and wood, with stable yard on one side and vegetable garden on the other, and with a swinging board in front bearing the sign of "The Dun Cow."

The tramp went straight into the taproom, where about half a dozen farm laborers were gathered, drinking beer, smoking, and discussing—what do you think?—the tramp laughed aloud as he heard them: the reward offered for the arrest of the fugitive murderer, the notorious Ham Gow!

"Eh, sonnies," grunted a gray old man in a whitey-brown smock frock, "ef a body could lay hold on the wagabone, as it might be now, he need never strike another stroke wi' pick or shovel! His everlastin' fortin' would be made, lads! Think on't!"

And the sage, with his hard forefinger, stirred up and poked down the tobacco in his pipe, replaced it between his lips and smoked vigorously.

"To hunner pund sterling ain't to be picked up every day by the like of us, Daddy Dodge," said a young fellow

in a shooting jacket, an under gamekeeper on a neighboring estate.

"Ef un 'ould walk in right here an' gi' 'imself up like a man, we could take him straight to the squoire and dewoide the two hunner pund among us! Two hunner pund among foive on us! How much 'ould that be, Daddy Dodge, for each un us?" inquired a young workman, in a blue blouse.

"A matter o' forty pund each," answered the gray old man, after scratching his head and reflecting for a moment. "But dunnot trouble your minds, sonnies, nor count your chickens before they are hatched. Thet wilyun will no be coming in here to gi' himself up. Tek my wurrud for 't," he added.

"Who are you talking of?" inquired the subject of these remarks, walking into their midst.

The five men immediately arose to their feet, touched their foreheads to the newcomer, whom they took at a glance to be a gentleman on a pedestrian tour, and looked toward old Dodge as their spokesman.

"Saving your presence, master, we was talking of that grand rep'obate, Ham Go, wot killed and murdered the young Arl of Harkaway down in Corn'all, and a-wishing we had him here at our marcy," explained the old man.

Ham Gow threw himself down on one of the benches, called for a pint of "arf an' arf," and leisurely supped it before he spoke again.

"What about it?" he then inquired.

"Wot 'bout wot, master?" asked the old man.

"This murder! You know I am a stranger in England now, having been absent some years, and only very recently returned."

This was true, insomuch as Gow had returned to his native land only two days before the homicide at Hawke Hall.

"Oh, thin yer dunnot know about the grand reward which have been offered as any poor man wot had the luck might pick up any day!" said Daddy Dodge, to whom the "two hunner pund" seemed of far more importance than any other circumstance attending the homicide at Hawke Hall.

"Grand reward—to be picked up by any man? No, I don't know anything about it. What is it for? The biggest

potato, the fattest sheep, the best-looking baby, or what?" demanded the tramp.

"Oh, g'long wid yer, master! 'Tis for the comprehension of that grand vilyun, Ham Go!"

"Ham Go? Who's he?"

"Yer don't know nothing, master! He's the man wot asseverated the arl at midnight in his four-post bed, all curtained with cloth of gold, which is the way of the royal nobility, and cut his head off and 'wided him into four quarters, and arterward stole his body to sell to the doctors right underneaf of the right honorable crowner hisself!" said the old man, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and beginning to refill it with tobacco.

"What an atrocious villain!" exclaimed Gow, sipping his "arf an' arf."

"Ay, he was. And there he is up there!"

"Where?" demanded the tramp, affecting to start.

"There!" said the old man, waving his pipe in the direction of a poster that was set up against the wall in a conspicuous part of the taproom. "There he be picked out in black and white, and a precious ruffin, too, with his bushy, black beard, and long, black hair, and dark complexion, like a wild Indian, and two hunner pund offered for his reprehension! Ah, the man as nabs him 'ill come in for a fortin!"

"Ah!" said the tramp, smacking his lips, and looking as if he wished it were himself would fall upon such a piece of good luck.

But the poor fellow was tired, footsore, hungry, and sleepy, and so he hailed the passing landlord, and said he would have supper and a bed, adding that he would take supper there—where he sat.

He was soon served with cold beef, bacon, bread, and cheese, and a tankard of ale, arranged upon a little wooden table drawn up before his bench.

After having regaled himself with these viands, he followed the chambermaid to a small, clean bedroom in one of the gables of the house, in which, when he was left alone, he sat down and had a good laugh all to himself.

"I wonder what those donkeys would have done if they had known the veritable man with the price on his head—the atrocious villain, Gow—was among them? Taken to

their heels at once and give me a wide berth, I do suppose. Courage, Ham! You will never be arrested as Gow! Ha! ha! ha! You languid swell, you are a deal more likely to be taken for the stolen body of the late earl!"

With these words he undressed and washed and went to bed between fresh white sheets that smelt of dried lavender.

He had no sooner laid his head upon the pillow than he fell into the sweet, deep sleep of a quiet mind in a tired body—a sleep that was unbroken for ten hours.

When he awoke the sun was shining through the quaint little window in the roof.

He sprang up, gave himself another refreshing wash, dressed, and went down and ordered his breakfast—coffee, brown bread, ham, and eggs—for once. Not another such a breakfast could the tramp afford to order on his journey.

"They hev got that grand rascal, sir," said the landlord, who waited on him at table.

"Whom do you mean? The murderer of the earl?" inquired the tramp.

"Yes, sir; him!"

"Ah! indeed; have they really got him, at last?"

"Yes, sir; for a fact they have. A passel of youngsters out on a lark found him in a gypsy encampment. Gypsies resisted, but a posset-come-and-take-him was summoned, and the vilyun was took—a horrid-lookin' ruffian as ever you set eyes on, sir. They brought him here while they baited their horses, for they had him bound in a break as they had borrowed, and was taking him off to police headquarters; and that's the way I came to see him."

"Are they sure they have got the right man?" inquired Gow, as he put half an egg into his mouth.

"Oh! ay, sir. His looks tallies exactly with that there inscription of him. No mistake about him."

"Glad to hear it," said Gow, as he drained his coffee cup at a draught, and rose from the table.

"They surprised him at the gypsy camp late last night, sir, about five miles from here, up in Squire Morley's big woods; but what with the squire being away at Wasser-Wasser—no—to Badinn-Badinn, and no other 'sponsible party at hand, and one delay and another, it were about sun up before they got him here on his way to headquarters. You might have heard them when they came?"

"No, I did not. I was tired, and I slept very soundly."

"I'd liked you to seen that ruffin', sir."

"And I should like to have seen him."

"He was little better looking than a wild, savage barbarian, sir."

"Shouldn't wonder. Will you let me have my bill?"

"Certainly, sir."

The tramp—nay, the pedestrian, we will call him, since he looks to be respectable, and is addressed as "sir"—the pedestrian then settled his account, shouldered his staff with the bundle attached to it, and went on his way.

From this time Mr. Gow walked with greater freedom on the highways, and slept in peace at the quaint little wayside inns that sparsely flanked the country roads and lanes.

At every inn the topic of conversation among the farm laborers and artisans that flocked thither to spend their evenings and their hard-earned money was the arrest of the notorious murderer.

Sometimes listening to the discussion in silence, and sometimes joining in it, Mr. Gow sat ruminating.

"I wonder if there is likeness enough, and circumstantial evidence enough, to hang that poor devil, in the absence of his power to prove an alibi, and a—a—what in the deuce is the Latin for somebody else? And I wonder if I oughtn't to go forward and give myself up to save a man who is as guiltless of that crime as—as I am myself—from being legally murdered? I—I think I ought to take this risk!"

This thought troubled the—pedestrian, not only while "he took his ease in his inn," but when he was on the road, and it continued to trouble him, until one lucky hour when, in setting forth for his day's journey, he passed through the main street of the village where he had spent the night, and, meeting a little newsboy, invested a penny in a cheap morning paper.

As he had entered into this mercantile transaction rather out of kindness to the barefooted little vender of papers than from any interest he took in politics, markets or gossip of the day, he folded the journal and put it in his pocket until his noontide rest should give him leisure to look over it.

He was now drawing near London, and, in fact, within

twelve hours' walk of the great metropolis, which he hoped to reach quite easily in the evening of that day.

When by the position of the sun and the admonition of his appetite he was warned that his dinner time had arrived, he stopped short in the green lane where he found himself, and, sitting down on a convenient stone, he took out his pint bottle of beer and the paper parcel containing his bread and bacon, and began to make a meal, ruminating in the meantime somewhat after this fashion:

"They will be sure to hang that man if I don't go forward. They say he can't prove an alibi, which is the Latin for somewhere else, and he can't prove a—what in Sancho is the Latin for somebody else? Everybody swears he is Ham Gow, and was at Hawke Hall on the night of the murder—and as Ham Gow he will certainly be hanged for the murder of the earl, unless I go forward and give myself up to save him! Now the question is, ought I to let a man be hanged for me even if I am as innocent as he? No, I ought not. I cannot and will not! As soon as I reach London I will go and report to the police! So that my fetch can go free! Ah, well! I wouldn't mind the hanging so much, that's soon over, and a guiltless man needn't fear death in any form or shape—but the imprisonment that precedes it is a horrid nuisance! But honor is honor, and I must not let another man swing for Ham Gow, guilty or innocent."

He scattered the crumbs left of his meal for the birds to eat, threw his waste paper and empty bottle over the hedge, and then drew from his pocket the journal he had bought from the newsboy, and began to look over it.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he turned a page. "What is this?"

He looked at the heading that had caught his sight with more attention, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

The paragraph was:

"NOT HAM GOW.

"The ruffian who was arrested a few days ago, for the notorious Gow, turns out to be another man, one Jack Hice, a convict recently returned from Tasmania, where he has been serving out his term of seven years' penal servitude for burglary, and who, since his arrival here, has been at

his old tricks, and is now wanted by the police on another account. And, therefore, though Mr. Hice is freed from the charge of murder in Cornwall, he is held for highway robbery in Kent. The criminal, Ham Gow, is still supposed to be at large."

Mr. Gow read this paragraph very carefully from beginning to end, and then threw back his head and laughed long and loudly.

When his peal of mirthful laughter was over, he thrust the paper in his pocket and arose to resume his journey, muttering to himself as he walked down the lane:

"Now, then, Ham, instead of going to a police court and giving ourselves up to go to prison and be hanged, we will betake ourselves to the East India Docks and look out for a ship bound for Australia."

He went on with a lighter step, for a great burden was lifted from his mind.

Late in the evening he came into London and found his way to an obscure inn, down one of the bystreets of Paddington, and there he took supper, and, being very much fatigued, immediately retired to bed.

The next morning he arose early, ate a hearty breakfast, and set out to walk to the East India Docks, some miles off; for Ham's funds were by this time too low to afford him the luxury of an omnibus ride.

It was late in the forenoon when he reached the thronged, laboring, and distracting docks, where the river was crowded with shipping and the shore with men, women, boys, boxes, barrels, and all the surging chaos that attends the landing or the clearing of great merchant and emigrant ships.

He made his way through these moving people, trucks, horses, bales, and everything, and inquired of the first rushing man whom he could bring to a standstill:

"Can you tell me if there is a ship to sail for Australia soon?"

"Where did you drop from, mate, to ask such a question as that? Ain't there the *Tasman*, to sail with the tide this artemnoon? There! Don't stop me!"

And away went the speaker, with a bale of goods on his shoulders.

"Do you know whether the *Tasman* has her full comple-

ment of seamen?" inquired Gow, laying hold of another flying stevedore.

"No, she's short-handed, aw b'lieve. Don't bother!"

And away went the second man, with a cask on his back.

Ham Gow slid himself into a boat that was just about to pull off for the *Tasman*, laden with casks, took up an oar and, unchallenged, worked his passage to the ship that was lying at anchor a few yards from the shore.

He climbed up the side of the *Tasman* and stood upon the crowded and busy deck.

"Could I speak with one of the officers?" he inquired of a deck hand.

"All too busy, I'm thinking," returned the latter, moving off.

"What is it, my man?" inquired the third mate, who had overheard the words.

"Wish to ship as a seaman for the passage out, sir," replied the tramp, touching his hat.

The officer eyed the applicant from head to foot, and "gauged" him—a stalwart, wholesome, able-bodied young man—for Gow had recovered from his languor and his pallor, during his seven days' saunter through the fresh air of the fine autumn weather.

"What is your name, my man?" demanded the officer.

Ham hesitated for a moment. The question took him by surprise. Then he answered, with a twinkle of his black eyes:

"Duplicate Hawke, sir."

"Dupe—what?" exclaimed the mate, bending his brows.

"—Licate Hawke, sir," solemnly replied Gow. "I was a twin, sir; first brother was called by a Christian name, Valentine, because he was born on St. Valentine's day, and I was called Duplicate because I was nothing but a duplicate, and they dubbed me Dupe for short. Hope my name will not be an objection?"

"N-n-o," replied the officer, with a smile. "Are you ready?"

"Quite, sir," replied the tramp, glancing over his shoulder at the bundle on the end of his stick, to intimate that it contained all his worldly goods.

"Then pass forward there, and lend a hand. You can sign your articles later."

"Ay, ay, sir!" promptly responded the new seaman, touching his hat.

And so Ham Gow sailed for Australia.

CHAPTER XX

GOLD

THE passage of many months in a single human life without the occurrence of any special event deemed worthy of record is a perpetual though not a very general experience.

Duplicate Hawke made the voyage from England to Australia without a single "adventure."

It was about the first of October when he sailed, as a man before the mast, in the emigrant ship *Janssen Tasman*, from London for Melbourne.

It was about the fifteenth of January when the ship entered the mouth of the Yarra-Yarra.

The English almanac declared it to be then midwinter. The aspect of nature proved it to be midsummer in the land to which our adventurer had come.

Melbourne was thickly crowded in the beautiful little valley in which the city had been first laid out and thinly scattered up the sides of the lovely, green-wooded hills that formed its suburbs.

As soon as Duplicate Hawke received his pay and his discharge he made his way into the city, to find out what was going on and how he should employ or advantage himself.

He found that there was a great deal going on over and above the usual intense activity of one of the very busiest cities, if not the very busiest, on earth.

Wondrously like London on a small scale, and with its face washed, looked this city of the Antipodes to our wanderer; there was the same sort of streets, houses, shops, banks, churches, crowds of mixed pedestrians hurrying to and fro, ragged boys, importunate beggars, uniformed policemen, *et cetera*.

In addition to its normal great bustle, Melbourne was

now undergoing one of those periodical attacks of mental fever to which she was peculiarly subject whenever the exciting news of the discovery of fresh gold fields spread a spiritual malaria over the city.

Duplicate Hawke hurried along Victoria Street, elbowed, pushed, shoved, and dragged by the surging crowd pressing to and fro. He had no particular reason to hurry. He was then only on his way to the Bank of Australia to get a ten-pound note changed into sovereigns and shillings, but he caught the spirit of the crowd and "tore" along as if life and death depended on his speed also.

He reached the bank at last.

It was crowded, like every other place, with men who had "business on their hands."

Duplicate Hawke caught himself wondering if all the dwelling houses in the city were not emptied of all their inhabitants except women and children.

He had to wait half an hour before he could get his ten-pound note changed into more convenient silver and gold.

When this was done he left the bank and went direct to a barber's shop, saying to himself:

"I must not let my hair and beard grow, even out here, and I must not abuse my skin. A clear complexion, a smooth chin and well-trimmed head will enable me to defy identification."

The barber's shop was not crowded. That seemed a wonder. Our traveler sat down in a chair and heaved a sigh of relief as he said to the knight of the brushes:

"I want my hair trimmed and beard shaved."

The barber commenced operations—shears and tongue going at the same time.

"Of course, you have heard the news," he said, as a crisp, black curl fell under his scissors.

"Not I. I have just arrived by the *Janssen Tasman*," replied Duplicate.

"Ah, indeed! A crowd have come over by her, I hear. Going to the diggings?"

"Perhaps; I don't know. I have been there before. Never was one of the lucky ones. At Black Creek Gully sunk a shaft two hundred feet deep and reached the bed rock only to find it a shicer, while the men all around me were getting up bottom that yielded from one to ten ounces

the painful. That was always my luck. But what is your news?" inquired Duplicate Hawke.

"Why, the richest gold field as has ever yet been discovered! At least, so 'tis said; but it is true that they say the same of every fresh find," cautiously added the communicator.

"Where is it?" eagerly demanded the adventurer, his interest rising.

"At Dead Maiden's Brook, about a hundred and fifty miles from here."

"When was it discovered?"

"Not more than a fortnight ago, and now there ain't less than two thousand people on the spot, and they are still rushing on."

"They will soon work the field out, at that rate."

"Not in a hundreds years they won't! At least, so 'tis said; but they say anything."

"Who found the gold there?"

"A fellow as wasn't looking for it—a teamster on his way from Yat-Yat to Jingibour. One of his oxen stumbled and fell upon his knees. Teamster and boy went to see what was the matter and help the ox to his feet; found a yellow knob 'bout as big as a door handle sticking up through the ground; saw it was gold in a minute; helped the brute to his feet and then dug up the gold—proved to be a solid nugget of two hundred weight, which was seventy pound, troy weight; better than the biggest nugget ever found yet. At least, so 'tis said; but they say anything."

"Which was the biggest nugget ever found?"

"That of Balarat—weighed a hundred and thirty pounds, troy weight, so 'tis said; but they say anything, you know."

"Why do they call that brook 'Dead Maiden's'?"

"Because there was a young girl belonging to Yan Borek Station lost in the bush for many days, and whose body was found drowned in that brook, which never had a name until that accident gave it one. So 'tis said; they say anything but their prayers, you know. Well, sir, there you are!" concluded the barber, as he gave the last finishing touched to his customer and removed the sheet from around him.

"There is a great rush to the new field," observed our traveler, as he paid his bill.

"Thank you, sir. Oh, I tell you!"

"Why don't you go yourself? Why do you ply this slow trade while you might be digging up nuggets of a hundred-weight each?" demanded Duplicate.

"And mightn't, sir! See your own ill luck. If my trade is slow, it is also safe and sure."

"True. Well, good-day and good custom to you," laughed Duplicate Hawke, as he walked out of the shop.

He made up his mind to go to the new gold fields—not that he expected to find the precious metal there himself. Luck had always been against him, and luck would always be against him, in that direction, at least, he thought; but he would go to the new fields to enter into that sphere of intense excitement and extreme activity in which he always felt his own vitality raised to a delirious height.

He determined that he would start that very day. He knew the indispensables of his outfit, and only the indispensables would he take. He began at once to gather them together.

He went first to a "boot, shoe, and leather shop," and purchased a pair of miner's long top bots, and a miner's full suit of yellow buckskin blouse and trousers, and an india-rubber blanket. Next he went to a "hardware store," where he bought a shovel, a pick, a chain, a coil of rope, a bucket and a pan.

Finally he took all these articles to a cheap "sailors' boarding house," where he engaged a small room for a few hours, dressed himself in his miner's suit and long boots, and ordered his dinner.

After that he put his movable property in as compact a shape as possible by tying his pick and shovel together and throwing them over his shoulder, with all his other effects dangling from them. His sailor's tarpaulin hat served admirably well for his journey, and thus completed his costume.

So he set out to seek his fortune.

He did not even have to inquire his way; he had only to follow a group of men, dressed and equipped somewhat in the same style as himself, and who were leaving the city by North Street.

There were several necessities with which Duplicate Hawke had not yet provided himself, and among them was

a mate. In working a shaft, three mates were desirable—one was indispensable; but our traveler hoped to pick up one or more, either on the road or at the new diggings.

So he tramped on alone, nor did he seek to overtake and join his fellow travelers until they had left the city boundary behind them.

The sun had sunk below the Western horizon, and

“The shades of night were falling fast,”

when he came up with the group, who had reached the top of a green hill and had sat down to rest for a few minutes.

“Hello, mates! Bound for the diggings?” demanded Duplicate Hawke, stopping and throwing himself down beside them with the freedom of his caste.

“Bound for the dickens, if the new gold field does not turn out any better than some that have been lately bragged on,” answered a red-bearded man, with a loud laugh, in which the others joined—probably with no better reason than the love of laughter.

“Like myself, you seem to prefer to travel by night,” remarked Duplicate, taking his pouch of tobacco from his pocket and passing it around.

The men helped themselves without returning thanks—as they would not have expected thanks had they treated a crowd—and while they filled their pipes the first speaker said, in reply to Duplicate’s observation:

“Yes, we walk by night, because in a climate like this, in such weather as this, it is the easiest way and the quickest, also.”

“And we make better time in the cool nights than we could in the hot days,” added another of the men, as he struck a match and lighted his pipe.

“You’ll see that as we go along, when we overtake and pass other pedestrians who walk only by day,” put in a third man.

“Say, now,” began the first speaker, “that we start as we did, at six o’clock in the afternoon, and walk by easy stages, with occasional stops for rest or food, until nine o’clock to-morrow morning, we shall have walked for fifteen hours and got over about thirty miles, more or less. We will then eat and lie down to sleep through the hottest part of the

day; wake up about five o'clock in the afternoon, wash, eat, and get ready to start at six on our second day's journey. Traveling in this manner, day after day, we shall easily average thirty miles a day; and as this is Monday evening, and Dead Maiden's Brook is one hundred and fifty miles off, we shall reach it on Saturday morning and have all day Sunday to rest and look about us. What do you think?" he inquired of the newcomer.

"I think your plan a good one," replied Duplicate Hawke.

"And now, mates, we will go on. Five minutes at the top of a hill is all we need allow ourselves. What do you think?"

"I quite agree with you," said Duplicate, smiling at the repetition of the question, as he arose to his feet and shouldered his traps.

They walked on, two by two, in a regular line of march. There were eight men in all—Duplicate Hawke making the eighth.

The red-bearded giant who had been the first spokesman of the party walked beside Duplicate Hawke and led the way.

"Are you quite willing that I should join your party?" inquired our adventurer.

"Why shouldn't we be, mate? 'The more the merrier,' you know."

"Ay, but there is a sequel to that proverb—"The fewer the better cheer,"" laughed Duplicate.

"Oh, I know there be narrow-minded, short-sighted diggers who, when they have found a new field, act like school-boys who have come upon a blackberry bush—want to have it all to themselves, and try to keep off a rush; when, if the field is really good for anything, a rush is the best thing that can happen to it for its development. Come on, mate, and welcome! You have as much right as anybody else," said the leader; and they plodded on good-humoredly together, those behind talking one with another on their own affairs.

Duplicate Hawke gathered from their conversation that they were all natives of his own county of Cornwall, and, with one or two exceptions, they were all Cornish miners come out to Australia to seek their fortunes in the gold regions.

"By the way, mate," said the leader, "if it be a civil question, what is your name? You needn't mention it if you do not like."

"My name is Duplicate Hawke," gravely replied our adventurer.

"Dupe—what?" demanded his companion, between a frown and a smile.

"—Licate Hawke," solemnly continued the traveler. "I was a twin. Two of us born within an hour of each other on St. Valentine's Day. Elder brother named Valentine in honor of the saint. Younger brother—that was me—called Duplicate, because he was a duplicate, and nothing else. Do you see?"

"I see; but I never heard of such a thing in all the days of my life!" exclaimed the miner, bursting into a loud laugh.

"You may call me Dupe, however, if you like. It is quite as appropriate to me as the other name. I was a duplicate. I have also been a dupe on several notable occasions—the last like to have cost me my life, and has left me a scar that I shall carry to my grave," said the traveler, raising his hand to the upper part of his forehead that was under his hat.

"Ah! 'Thereby hangs a tale.' Will you tell it, to while away the hour?"

"Not now. Some time, perhaps. But I will enlighten you thus far: I was not the dupe of any man or of any woman on the occasion I refer to. I was the dupe of my own pride and vanity. But now, friend, what is your name, if you please?"

"I was only waiting to see if you took interest enough in me to ask. My name is George Traverse. My people came originally from Hawkeville. I have an uncle there now. He is the land steward of the estate of Hawkewood, and I have a brother who is in holy orders, though you might not think it to look at me. He is the Rev. Paul Traverse, and is a curate in the parish of St. James, in Bermondsey, London. I am a miner, and the son of a superintendent of mines. My father is gone to the better world. He gave his two sons—the parson and myself—each a good education. That took all his savings. He left no money.

Paul got his curacy, and I came out here to seek my fortune in the gold mines."

"I hope you have found it," said Duplicate Hawke, speaking very sincerely, though he only spoke by way of making some response to the communication of his companion; for, in truth, his mind was filled with surprise and dismay at the discovery he had just made, or, rather, at the revelation which had just been made to him.

"Not yet. I have not been lucky. May fare better next time," answered the miner, with a smile.

"You say you have an uncle in Hawkeville. Have you ever visited him there?" inquired Duplicate Hawke, in a panic; for he was ignorant of how much or how little the Cornish miner might know of the homicide at Hawke Hall.

"Never set foot in Hawkeville, or saw my uncle in the whole course of my life. Never even corresponded with him. My father left Hawkeville when he was a young man, and married, and ever after lived in Clanwyd; and, without ill will, the brothers just drifted apart and became estranged from each other. Paul, however, got his first curacy there, but he did not keep it long. He left it for a more active field of labor in Bermondsey. By the way, mate, you speak like a Cornishman."

"I am a Cornishman," replied Duplicate Hawke.

"Oh, I thought so. Then, what part, if I may inquire?"

"Demondike," replied the traveler, after a little reflection.

"Ah! I never heard of that place. An all-savored name, er, mate?"

"The place has a foolish legend that it was made by demons in one night."

"Oh!" said the Cornishman, and then he sank into silence.

They walked on over a rough road, up and down hill, under the night sky. It was not, however, a gloomy night, though there was no moon; for the dark, purple, immeasurably transparent sky was studded thickly with the great, splendid stars of the Southern hemisphere.

When they required rest they would sit down for about five minutes, usually on the top of some hill. Then they would rise and go on again.

After midnight their way lay through a dense forest,

where all was so still, so breathless, in the midsummer night, that even the wild beasts that infested it by day seemed absent, dead or asleep.

So passed the hours.

The earliest dawn of morning found them still in the forest, still plodding on through what seemed little more than a "brush track" through the dense thicket.

When the coming sun had reddened the eastern horizon, they emerged from the forest upon a stony plateau, where the trees were stunted and far apart.

Here they came upon a very pleasant family scene in the open air.

Two tilted wagons with covers white as snow; four strong young bullocks tethered to the trees; a group of chattering and laughing men, women, and children, and a "gypsy" fire with a teakettle hanging over the blaze, and a frying pan on the coals, and the appetizing fragrance of boiling coffee and frying ham diffusing itself through the fresh morning air.

This party were evidently of those who preferred to travel by day and sleep by night; but, then, they did not have to travel on foot, which made all the difference.

They had evidently just risen from their night's rest in the wagons, and were preparing to breakfast, and set forward on their journey.

Some of the women were laying a cloth on the stony ground, and bringing cups, saucers, and plates, knives and forks and spoons from the wagons, to arrange upon it. Others were cutting bread, while others again, at a distance from the breakfast arrangements, were spreading out their bedding that it might be aired before being rolled up and re-packed into the wagons.

The men were engaged in feeding the bullocks and watering them from a little stream that ran gurgling over the stones and through the camping ground.

Children were flying about everywhere, picking the wild flowers that grew along the stream or under the trees, or anywhere where there was soil and moisture enough to sustain them, or chasing the brilliant moths and butterflies with which the wilderness abounded.

It was a delightful scene to come upon after a night's weary walk. Sight, hearing, smell, were all saluted with

pleasant views, sounds, and scents; mind and heart were gratified by the presence of sweet human affections, and interests found suddenly in desert places.

CHAPTER XXI

MEETING AN OLD FRIEND

THE walking party and the camping party perceived each other in the same instant, and set up a simultaneous shout of greeting.

"Throw down your swag, mates, and stop and get some breakfast with us. Here, mother! Put another gallon of water and half pound of coffee into the kettle. We have got company!" cried a stalwart, brown-bearded man of middle age, who seemed to be the leader of this gang.

"Thank you very kindly, mate; but here are eight of us—a formidable number to add to your domestic circle," replied George Traverse, with a doubtful glance toward his companions, and a longing one toward the steaming, fragrant coffeekettle.

"I wish there were sixteen of you! The kids would be safer from the blacks. Ground your swag, now, without more jaw!"

"Do you keep boarders, then?" inquired Traverse, who, seeing that his companions had thrown down their burdens and seated themselves upon the ground, concluded to accept the invitation.

"Do we keep boarders? Say, Nell, my dear, do we keep boarders?"

"No!" very decidedly responded a young woman in a brown calico suit and a straw hat, who stood leaning over a piece of bacon that she held resting upon the shaft of a wagon, while with a sharp carving knife and a strong hand she was slicing additional rashers.

"No, you see; but we entertain strangers now and then, according to the Scriptures. Don't we, Nell?"

"Yes," responded the taciturn woman in the straw hat, cutting away vigorously.

"But, of course, you will permit us to pay you, as we are such a large party?" suggested Traverse.

"That is as may be. If you are all flush and it concerns your conscience, why, you eight may make up half a sov. among you. Your grub won't cost us a penny more, and we don't want to make money off you. But if you are not flush, you shall be welcome all the same, mind you."

"All right, mate. We are flush enough for that, and we return you hearty thanks, for we have nothing better than cold meat and bread in our pack; and a square breakfast, including coffee, will be a godsend to us."

"Well, there, then, we have had too much jaw over such a trifle, anyhow. There with me are my two brothers and three brothers-in-law, all single men; my two sons, hearty lads of fourteen and fifteen; my wife, there, who don't look as if she was the mother of twelve children, do she, now?" inquired the leader, jerking his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the woman who was still slicing bacon.

"Shouldn't take the lady to be more than twenty-five," said Duplicate Hawke, who had kept silent and in the background longer than it was his habit to do.

"Add ten years to that, and you will be all right. She's thirty-five. I'm forty—rather advanced in life to go seeking my fortune in the gold mines, but it is for the lads' sakes. And, then, there are my two oldest daughters, Ann and Jane, twins, seventeen years of age; and then these stair steps," added the man, with a laugh, as he pointed to a group of children, who had left off flower pulling and fly chasing to come and stand and stare at the strangers—"then these stair steps are boy and gal, one after the other, from thirteen year old down to three. The two youngest—eighteen months and six months old—are asleep in the wagon."

"You have 'a quiver full of them,'" said George Traverse.

"Oh, ay! the blessed wise has blessed me with a blessed baby every blessed year of our blessed marriage! The house of Jones is not like to run out in our time. We are all Joneses here. I was a Jones and I married a Jones. Not a cousin, however. We were of no kin to each other, though we bore the same name. And we men are most of us Jims, or Johns, of Toms. And the women are Nells, Anns or Janes. No fancy names among us! What might yours be, mate?" inquired the talkative Jones, turning to our adventurer.

"Well, mine might be John Smith, or anything you please—but it is Duplicate Hawke," replied the latter, with a smile.

"Dupe—what?" inquired Jones, in the selfsame words and tone in which the question had been twice before asked.

"—Licate Hawke," answered the traveler, with gravity; adding, in explanation, the little romance he had already invented to explain his possession of the strange alias he had chosen.

"Humph! Well! Our first children were twin gals, as I told you. I named the eldest Ann; but I'd like to seen the mother's face if I had called the youngest Duplicate, or Duplicata, either! Though, to be sure, we might have shortened it to Kate. But, there! the wife is calling us to breakfast. Let us go," said Mr. Jones, leading the way to the—tablecloth, followed by all his companions and guests.

There was not room around the six-foot square of white linen for the large company that were to be provided for; but the mother and her two grown daughters sat down by the huge coffeekettle and the pyramids of fried bacon and cut bread—not to be first to devour the viands before them, but rather to fill the cups and plates and hand them to the children, who distributed them among the men seated on the ground.

There were not cups and saucers enough to go around, and their number had to be supplemented with bowls, cans, and porringers.

But before the meal was over everybody was abundantly satisfied and refreshed.

Then came the washing up of crockery ware, spoons, and cutlery, and its packing into hampers to be stowed in one of the wagons; and next came the gathering and rolling up of the bedding to be put away in the other wagon.

Finally the bullocks were harnessed up, and the women and children hoisted in, and the procession was ready to start.

"We men walk beside the wagons and drive the bullocks most of the time, but take it by turns to get in one of the wagons along of the women, and children, and pots, and kettles, when we want a rest. Now, mates, if you have a mind to travel in our company, you can each have a lift,

now and then," said Peter Jones to George Traverse and his companions.

"I thank you heartily in the name of myself and all of my comrades. We will walk with you a couple or three hours, and then we must lie by until evening. We have walked all night," said Traverse, gratefully.

"Oh, I see! You are fly-by-nights, owls, bats! Well, every man to his taste. As for us, we like to travel by day and sleep by night. Hello! Who have we here?"

The question was excited by the appearance of a troop of horsemen that came clattering out of the woods. A dozen or more they seemed to be, and, by their dress and equipment, all miners or adventurers bound for the diggings, for each man had his swag rolled into a large bundle and strapped, and some had even pots, kettles, and pans dangling from their saddle bows.

"Hello!" and "Hello!" were the first greetings exchanged between the new arrivals and the occupants of the ground.

And then followed a volley of "chaffing" from the horsemen as they clattered away, which is utterly unreportable here.

"Ruffians!" indignantly exclaimed Peter Jones, when they had clattered out of sight. "This here is the worst of taking women and children along of us. But it is a choice of evils."

No one answered him, and in a short time the wagons were in motion, with the men walking beside them.

It was still early—but seven o'clock—and pleasant traveling. The bullocks moved at a walking pace, and the men, refreshed by rest, easily kept up with them.

They were going over a stony, undulating, open country, where the ground was covered by a coarse grass and dotted here and there with thickets of stunted oak.

As the sun rose higher in the heavens the heat increased so that by nine o'clock it was very severe.

Still our pedestrians persevered for another hour, and then Duplicate Hawke and his companions stopped short, took leave of the Joneses, and let them go on before.

"We shall meet at the new fields, anyway," said Duplicate Hawke to the kindly Peter.

"Before that, I expect. For, if you sleep through the

noonday while we are traveling, we shall sleep through the whole night while you are walking. So you may overtake us and breakfast with us to-morrow morning," were the words that Peter Jones threw back to his late guests as he walked beside his bullocks, cracking his long, black, snake-like whip.

As soon as they were left alone, Duplicate Hawke and his friends sought the shady side of a clump of trees a little off to the left of the beaten track, and there they unrolled and spread their blankets on the ground, and making their packs into pillows, stretched themselves out full length and yielded themselves up to a sleep as deep and sweet as ever visited the frames of wearied travelers.

All day long an endless procession of adventurers in drays, in wagons, on horseback, or on foot, traveled along the highway near them without disturbing their repose.

They might have been sleeping under the ground instead of above it for all they knew of what was passing beside them.

And, on the other hand, the travelers knew as little of their proximity, for the thicket of trees hid them completely from the passers-by on the highway—if, indeed, that could be called a "highway" which was but little better than a bush track.

The sun was setting when the first one of the party awoke. He was the oldest man there, and, consequently, he was the lightest sleeper. He rubbed his eyes and roused himself, recalled his dormant faculties, remembered where he was, and began to shake up his comrades.

They were awakened with more difficulty; but once aroused, they started up, full of life and activity, washed their faces as if it had been sunrise, instead of sunset, ate their cold bread and meat, drank water from the little spring in the heart of the thicket, rolled up their blankets and strapped them on their backs, and left their shelter for the highroad.

There a contrasting scene met them. A small group of pedestrians, who had been walking all day, were kindling a fire on the other side of the road, and spreading blankets around it preparing to spend the night on the spot.

The usual greetings passed between these men.

"Stop with us," said one of the newcomers. "It will be safer, and one fire will do for us all."

"Thank you very much," said George Traverse, "but we have been sleeping through the heat of the day, and we intend to walk through the coolness of the night."

"Don't know but what you are in the right of it! It was as hot as Tophet to-day."

Traverse and his comrades nodded good-by to the resting party and trudged on their way.

The country through which they tramped grew more and more rugged.

Here and there they passed a watch fire with a group of sleeping travelers on the ground, near it; or a tilted wagon, with recumbent bullocks about it, or a tent with half a dozen or so of tethered horses; all these being signs of the multitude that were on their way to the new gold fields.

Their road grew worse and worse, and led further and further into the wilderness; dangerous gullies had to be passed; perilous brooks to be forded; difficult ridges to be crossed.

But that from the purple heavens above their heads the splendid stars of the Southern hemisphere shone on their way, and the watch fires of sleeping travelers marked their path, they must have been forced to stop and wait for daylight to pursue their journey.

Yet day was destined to bring them into more savage, desolate, and repulsive regions, where the gullies became dread ravines, the brooks raging torrents, the ridges frightful precipices—the whole country formidable, stupendous, terrible.

Meanwhile they plodded on, ignorant of what was before them.

In the dead of night, in the wildest part of this weird desert, they heard a sound more startling under the circumstances than would have been a voice from the invisible world—the feeble wail of a young infant.

Strange! Most strange! But to these wandering men, through a savage wilderness infested with wild beasts and wilder men, this weak cry brought a sense of peace and safety.

"We're not out of the world yet," said Traverse, and the others grunted an assent.

In another moment they saw the red gleam of a watch fire, and came upon an encampment of tilted wagons and tethered horses.

All the party appeared to be asleep in the wagons, except two—the man who was sitting by the watch fire to replenish it with fuel from time to time, and the woman who was walking a baby up and down between the tilted wagons.

Seeing so large a party approach, the watchman by the fire was on his feet in an instant with his musket presented and the challenge on his lips:

“Who goes there?”

“Friends,” answered Traverse—“miners, like yourselves, on our way to the new gold fields.”

“You are late afoot! You might have been blacks or bushrangers, for aught we could tell,” replied the man at the fire, grounding his weapon.

“We walk by night and rest through the heat of the day,” explained Duplicate Hawke, who would always put his word in.

“A good plan, too, where it is practicable,” assented the stranger.

Meanwhile the baby had ceased its wailing—perhaps the sound of other voices had stilled its own—and the woman had withdrawn with it into one of the wagons.

The travelers bade good-night to the camping party and proceeded on their way.

“I think that man took your word very easily. How did he know you, or rather we, were what you represented us to be?” inquired Duplicate Hawke of his comrade, as they trudged on side by side together.

“Oh, by our general appearance, as we came within the light of the fire—by our dress and accouterments. Blacks and bushrangers don’t go about in miner’s rig with blankets strapped to their backs and shovels and pickaxes flung across their shoulders, with pans and kettles dangling from their handles,” replied George Traverse.

They plodded on patiently for a few hours longer, their progress slow on account of the uncertain light and the perilous road.

They passed other watch fires and camping parties. Sometimes they were challenged by the watchmen at the fires, but always allowed to pass in peace. For some hours

they had seen looming ahead of them, through the semi-darkness, a huge black mass that seemed to reach from east to west, and from earth to heaven.

As the morning dawned slowly they began to recognize a lofty mountain range whose vast front bristled with stunted evergreens and sharp rocks.

At its base, like a crimson star, gleamed the watch fire of some camping party.

"We shall have to stop here, mates, until sunrise. It would be useless to attempt to find the pass of that mountain in this obscure light," announced George Traverse.

His weary companions, much more fatigued by the ruggedness of their way than they had been on the previous days, gladly assented to the proposal.

They went on a few yards further, however, until they found a convenient place for resting; then they threw down their swag, unrolled their blankets, and spread them upon the ground, preparatory to stretching themselves at ease.

"But we must build a fire," said George Traverse. "In a place like this, it will never do to go to sleep without that protection."

And he drew a box of matches from his pocket and began to look around for combustible material.

There was none at hand. The stunted oak that grew there was green and hard. There was no dry brush to be seen.

"I will look further," said Duplicate Hawke, who, being a trained tramp from his boyhood, was more accustomed to continuous walks and less fatigued than his companions.

He left his party and walked toward the base of the mountain. There he found a little dry brush scattered at long intervals, and began to gather it.

In doing so he came up close to the watch fire their party had seen from a distance.

A single man sat on the ground beside it; no other person, no wagon, no bullocks, or horses were near.

On the approach of a stranger, the man at the fire sprang up and presented his revolver, with the usual challenge:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend—a miner, as you are probably, bound for the new gold fields—looking about just now for kindling wood.

Don't you see?" said Duplicate Hawke, holding up his wisp of brush.

The watchman suddenly dropped his revolver, caught up a burning and flaming brand from the fire, and held it close to the newcomer's face, exclaiming, excitedly:

"Who are you? Your voice is familiar—your face—Great Heaven, Ham Gow!"

"Hsh-sh-sh! my lord! Cut that name! Would your lordship put a rope around my neck?" demanded the tramp, lost in amazement at the unexpected *rencontre*.

"Cut my lord, if it comes to that! I am Ham—ilton Gow—er, at your service," said the watchman.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir! I mistook you for a noble earl I had once the honor to serve in the old country. I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Ham—ilton Gow—er! Allow me to introduce myself—Duplicate Hawke, at your orders!"

"Dupe—what?" demanded the watchman, in the identical words and tone in which the question had always been asked by others.

"—Licate Hawke. There was another Hawke who had a Christian name. I am his duplicate."

"Oh, I see! I see," laughed Hamilton Gower; "but how is it that I find you here when I left you 'in the lap of luxury,' 'rolling in wealth,' as the maid servants say? Did you weary of it all, as some one else did? Was the ruling passion too strong for you? Did you bolt?"

"I did bolt, my lor—Mr. Hamilton Gower, I mean—but I didn't bolt because I was tired of grandeur, or anxious to resume my roving over the world. I bolted to save my neck."

"What? How was that?"

"I had to fly for my life, my lord—Mr. Hamilton Gower. I was charged with your lordship's—with the Earl of Hawkewood's murder."

"Oh-h-h! I perceive," muttered the watchman, after a pause. "You could not play your part! The earl was missing, and naturally enough you were suspected of having made away with him. I had no idea I had left you exposed to such peril, though I ought to have thought of it, my poor Ham——"

"Dupe, sir."

"Why didn't you explain?"

"Couldn't, sir. The earl was found dead in his bed."

"Eh!" exclaimed Mr. Gower, with his eyes open to their widest extent.

"It is a fact, sir, and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of willful murder against me and your—his lordship's valet."

"Man! what mad tale is this you are telling me?"

"A mad tale enough, but a true one, all the same, my lord—Mr. Gower, I mean. 'The king is dead! Long live the king!' The monument of Horace Hawke, sixteenth Earl of Hawkewood, is set up in Hawkeville Church, and Lewis Manton, seventeenth Earl of Hawkewood, reigns in his stead."

Mr. Hamilton Gower was not given to profanity; he had been piously brought up by a doctor of divinity; but on this occasion he expressed his sentiments in language utterly unreportable, concluding with the abrupt question:

"Where in the demon did those asses of the coroner's jury find a body to sit upon?"

Before Duplicate Hawke could reply, a shrill call, peculiar to the bush of Australia, was heard:

"Coo-ee!"

"It is one of my mates. He is calling me. I will run and meet him, and give him this kindling, and be back in a trice!" exclaimed Duplicate Hawke, as he turned and ran off.

"Coo-ee!" called the voice in the wilderness again.

"Coo-ee!" responded Hawke, running toward it.

Not a hundred yards off he met George Traverse hurrying toward him.

"Thought you were lost!" exclaimed the latter.

"No. Met a friend from the old country. Man at watch fire over there. He is quite alone. I'm going back to him to share his watch and have a talk. Will see you again after an hour or so. Here's your kindling, and a plenty of it," said Duplicate Hawke, hurriedly; and he pushed his bundle of brush into the arms of his mate, and turned and strode back to the watch fire where Mr. Hamilton Gower, with uncontrollable impatience, awaited him.

CHAPTER XXII

REVEALING A MYSTERY

THE sun was rising when Duplicate Hawke got back, under the shelter of the great mountain, where Mr. Hamilton Gower sat by his fading watch fire.

Hawke burst into a loud laugh as he approached.

"What is the matter with you?" testily demanded Mr. Gower.

"I beg pardon, my lord——"

"Stow that and tell me what you were laughing at."

"To see your lordsh—— Beg pardon again! To see you, sir, looking so jolly like me in all particulars that we might be taken for twin brothers!" replied Mr. Hawke.

"We are counterparts now certainly—having not only the same forms and the same features, but the same sunburned complexion, the same three months' growth of black beard, and the same miner's rig of yellow buckskin blouse and trousers," assented Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"I say, my lo—Mr. Hamilton Gower, I mean—when I first fell in with the party below there, they naturally wanted to know my name, and, having made a present of my own name, I borrowed another, or rather invented one, and told them that I was called Duplicate Hawke, because I was the second of a pair of twins born on St. Valentine's Day; that the first twin was named in honor of the saint, and the second Duplicate, because he was nothing but a duplicate. I think, sir, I had better introduce you to my mates as my elder twin brother."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well thought of, Ham!"

"Dupe, if you please, my l—sir!"

"Dupe, then! But we must think before we speak, or we shall be betraying each other!"

"Yes, sir."

"And now tell me what I am so anxious to know: What happened after we parted at Hawke Hall?"

"Well, my lord—beg pardon. I will remember after a while."

"I hope you will, but go on."

"Well, sir, I should tell you, in the first place, that if I

had been in my sober senses I should never have consented to play a part that I must have known I could not carry out successfully."

"Were you not in your sober senses?"

"By no means, my lord—beg pardon again! It will come after a while!"

"I think we had better not join your mates until it does come right."

"Oh, no fear, sir! As soon as we are with them caution will be in the ascendancy."

"I trust so. Go on."

"I said I was not in my right senses, sir, when I agreed to play the part I did, sir, or else I should never have ventured on a performance that came near costing me my life in more ways than one."

"But why do you say that you were not in your sober senses?"

"Because I know I wasn't sir. You see, while I was waiting for you—while I was waiting for you to send for me to your rooms the butler employed me washing glasses in the pantry. Such loads of glasses came out of the supper room, many of them half or a quarter full of wine! Now I never had been used to wine, but I hated to pour so much good stuff down in the sink, so I drained every glass before I washed it, and so, whether it was from the quantity of the wine I drank, or the mixture of so many sorts, it made me crazy and reckless."

"I did not perceive that you were drunk," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"No, my lord, because I was not really drunk. I never was drunk in my life; but I was never so near it as that night of your lordship's birthnight ball, when I washed the wine glasses for the butler, and drained them before doing so. I was just exhilarated up to the point of recklessness."

"Now proceed with your story, and tell me what happened after I left you."

"Well, when you and your valet had left the room, and the sound of your footsteps had died away along the corridor, so that I knew you had really gone and would not turn back and detect me in my vanity, I crept out of bed, lighted the wax candles, each side of the dressing glass, and

stood before it and contemplated my transfigured self—my delicate enameled complexion, my neatly trimmed and dressed hair, my smooth chin, and my elegant mustache, and my dainty clothing—and I felt what a new and delicious sense of life and enjoyment a perfumed bath and fine white linen brought to a man. I bowed to myself in the glass. I congratulated and complimented myself, and thought it was rather a good thing to be an earl.”

“I did not, you know,” put in Mr. Hamilton Gower.

“No, nor I—for very long,” laughed Duplicate Hawke.

“Well, go on.”

“After disporting myself a little longer before the glass I went back to bed, drew the fine, fragrant sheets and soft silken coverlet over my shoulders, and gave myself up to the enjoyment of the hour. But the fumes of the wine were passing off from me, and a reaction was setting in—not a sick one—my constitution was too sound, and the wine was too good—but a sober and thoughtful reaction.”

“Ah!” interrupted Mr. Hamilton Gower.

“I began to wonder how I should ever be able to play the part I had undertaken, and why on earth I ever had undertaken it! But the delicious bed and all the splendid and luxurious surroundings were so delightful to mind and body that I determined to enjoy them, and put off the evil day of detection and expulsion as long as possible. I knew that although I was transfigured into a perfect facsimile of your lordship, and although I could subdue my voice to your lordship’s tone, and also that I could—thanks to the parish school—speak fair English, yet by many little transgressions of conventionalities I must inevitably betray myself. I wonder your lordship did not think of all this yourself.”

“I never thought of anything but playing a practical joke on my tiresome old tutor, and getting away from him,” laughed Mr. Hamilton Gower.

“Well, my lord,” resumed Duplicate Hawke.

“I suppose it is of no use to ask you again to drop that title?” interrupted Mr. Gower.

“Not in the least, your lordship. I cannot help it, you see. The force of habit is too strong; but I will drop it of necessity when I get among my mates yonder.”

“Proceed.”

"I lay there thinking how I might contrive to enjoy the delights of my new position as long as possible without discovery, and I made up my mind how I would do it."

"Oh!"

"Yes, I did, my lord. I determined that I would keep my bed the next day, and not allow the light to fall full upon my face for fear of discovery—that in point of fact, I would keep my bed as long as possible, and be waited on in my room, and have my meals and books and wine brought to me there, and never let in the full light, or get up and walk about, except when I should be quite alone, with the door locked."

"Well, you would have had a suite of three rooms to roam through—bedroom, dressing room, and sitting room—so you would not have been cramped for space, and might have made yourself very comfortable," laughed Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"So I thought. And I also thought that after the company should have left the Hall I might go downstairs and walk and drive through the park, and even through the neighborhood, and by caution and reserve successfully pass myself off for your lordship, who was not very familiarly known, even in your own neighborhood."

"No; Heaven knows that I was not."

"And then, by having the originally identical mold of features between your lordship and myself heightened by hair-dressing and enameling until the likeness between us was perfect in the smallest detail, I was such a complete facsimile to your lordship as would make my detection by most persons impossible."

"Ay."

"With this pleasant prospect of enjoyment before me—with the growing conviction that with caution I might personate your lordship for a long time yet to come, and, perhaps, until your return on gaining your majority to claim your own—I fell into a long, delicious sleep."

"I do not know how long I had slept when I was aroused by a noise in my room of something falling, as if accidentally knocked down."

"Then I instantly remembered that I had forgotten to lock the door after you. I called out:

"'Who is there?'"

"At the same moment a dark figure darted to my side, lifted a club, and dealt me a heavy blow.

"There was a crashing sound through my head, a thundering in my ears, a flashing light that seemed to set the room in a conflagration, and then all was darkness and oblivion."

"What are you telling me? That there was an attempt made to murder you?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower, aghast.

"Yes. An attempt that was very nearly successful. I must have lain unconscious for several hours, for, when I came to myself, I was laid out on a long table in the middle of the floor of a long room, with six tall windows opening on the lawn."

"That was the justice room."

"So I had good reason to know. I was so weak when I recovered my consciousness that I could hardly stir; but my ears were wide open, and I heard a stir in the upper end of the room, and then a voice—a voice that I knew well enough to be the coroner's, for I had heard it often enough in cases of 'found drowned' along the coast——"

"Upperman's?"

"Yes, my lord—Coroner Upperman's. Well, my lord, he was asking:

" 'Gentlemen, have you made up your verdict?'

"And some one answered, as if he was reading from a paper:

" 'We find that Horace Hawke, Earl of Hawkewood, came to his death on the morning of the second of September from a blow on the head by a blunt weapon held in the hand of one Ham Gow, a tramp, aided and abetted by one Henri Delaplaine, valet to the deceased.'"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Hamilton Gower. "I cannot help enjoying this, Ham! Seeing you here in perfect safety, you know!"

"Well, I didn't enjoy it—at the time. I was weak and dizzy, and, on hearing that strange verdict, I had an insane idea that I should then and there be carried off to prison and eventually hanged for your murder."

"It did not occur to you then that you had personated me, and, as the murdered earl, they had been holding an inquest on your body, supposing it to be mine?"

"No, not then; for I was dizzy and confused, and I relapsed into unconsciousness almost immediately."

"What followed?"

"I don't know. Of course, the inquest must have adjourned, and the room must have been shut up, waiting the arrival of the undertaker; for when I recovered consciousness again the place was dark, or would have been but for the moonlight shining through the slats of the window shutters. Memory came slowly back to me.

"I could recall the blow that I had received, and which had stunned me for so many hours. I could also recall the momentary knowledge I had gained of the coroner's inquest. And I understood it all, though imperfectly, for I still had the impression that I was held in custody for the murder of the Earl of Hawkewood, and I was anxious to escape.

"I moved, slightly lifted my head, and divined, rather than knew, that I was alone. I rolled over and let myself roll off the table on to the floor.

"The shock did me good. I saw that all the windows were hoisted, and I crawled to one of them and managed to draw the bolt and open the shutters. Then I nearly fainted from the reaction after the effort.

"The light of the late moon that rose near morning streamed in through the open window, and showed me, among other objects of interest, a decanter of brandy standing on a side table.

"If I could only reach that brandy, I thought; and I crawled on all fours to the side table and helped myself to my knees by holding on to its top, and so I got hold of that decanter of brandy and took a good pull of it.

"It gave me strength. I tottered to my feet, and staggered to the window and went out through it to the lawn.

"With every step I seemed to gain strength. I turned my steps toward the Ruined Tower, and—tottering, falling, resting, rising—I managed to reach it by sun up. I reeled into the strong room and into the presence of the two women, and fell down for dead!"

"You must have startled them a little!" said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"I suppose I did! Anyway, when I came to my senses I found myself in—in a secure hiding place known to

them. They had heard there was a warrant out against me, and they kept me in that place and nursed me until I got well."

"It is strange the tower was not one of the first places searched," said Mr. Gower.

"Bless your lordship, so it was! Not only searched, but guarded by the police for about two weeks, until—ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"What in the deuce is the matter now?" demanded Mr. Gower.

"I beg your lordship's indulgence! I cannot help laughing to think of it! You know that pious lot of Wesleyans—Abbott and his crowd?"

"Yes; what of them?"

"They came home from a trip across the Channel, and as soon as they heard of the 'murder,' went to Hawke-wood Hall and lodged information that on that same said second of September when the murder was said to have been committed, they had unsuspectingly taken Ham Gow aboard their fishing craft, and that they had carried him over to the coast of France, and left him there at the little fishing hamlet of St. Rosalie! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, my lord, the police were drawn off from the Ruined Tower, and the hue and cry went to France after me! Of course, it was your lordship who went over to the coast of France with Abbott and his men?"

"Not I, indeed! I never went with Abbott."

"No?"

"Certainly not. I went in quite another direction!"

"Then who in the deuce could it have been? There surely cannot be another living man who resembles me as perfectly as your lordship honors me by doing—so perfectly as to have been mistaken for me by my oldest and most intimate friends! If it were not your lordship, who could it have been?"

"I don't know! Go on with your narrative."

"Well, just as soon as the police were withdrawn from the house, I left the Ruined Tower and tramped to London, without let or hindrance.

"Sickness, confinement, loss of blood had so bleached my complexion and emaciated my frame that, with my chin smoothly shaven and my hair trimmed, and in a neat

sailor's dress, I passed everywhere in safety, looking so unlike the burly, black-bearded, tawny-skinned ruffian I was described to be, that I stood with other men in bar-rooms and at crossroads reading the placards and posters describing my person and offering a reward for my apprehension, unflinching and unsuspected! That description was as good as a passport to me."

"It certainly must have been."

"Well, my lord, I had some adventures on my way to London, and will tell you of them when we have more time."

"Over the camp fires at the diggings, this coming autumn."

"Exactly, my lord. But it is enough now to say that I reached London safely, went down to the East India docks, found the *Janssen Tasman*, ready to sail for Melbourne, short of hands, shipped as a seaman for the voyage out, and reached Melbourne only three days ago; heard of the new rush, and started, with others, to seek my fortune at the new fields.

"This is my third day's march, and I have found you. There, Lord Hawkewood, is my story. But as your lordship did not cross the Channel with Abbott and his men, who could have deceived them into the idea that they had taken me across?"

"I say I do not know. I say I went in the opposite direction. After I had been so well gotten up as a tramp, by the aid of a little walnut juice to embrown my complexion, and a black wig and a false black beard (how lucky for my enterprise that Delaplaine had these things in his possession ever since he went to the opera masque ball as Fra Diavolo!) and your full suit of clothes, including shoes and hat, I went boldly on to Hawkeville Station, took a third-class ticket and got on board the 'parliamentary,' thinking myself secure from meeting anyone who had ever seen either me or you before, for I never traveled third-class and you never traveled by any class."

"Never was on a railway train in my life," put in Mr. Duplicate Hawke.

"So I thought. And so I entered the third-class on the parliamentary train for London, and felt myself secure from any sort of recognition, for the seats were nearly all

filled by laborers and artisans and their families. But I was mistaken; for presently a gentleman in a clerical dress got in, took the seat by my side, held out his hand, and said:

"Ah! Gow, my friend! I am glad to see you! It is long since we have met."

"Very long, your reverence," I growled, in as good an imitation of your gruff voice as I could command, as I recognized the parson as the Rev. Paul Traverse, a nephew of our steward, and who had taken holy orders and been appointed a curate to assist our aged rector, some years before, but who, on the death of the latter and the succession of Dr. Vincent, had gone to take a curacy in Bermondsey, London. I had not seen him since. He began to 'improve' the occasion and myself immediately.

"I hope you have given up your wandering life, my friend," he said.

"Yes, your reverence. I am going out to Australia, where there is a good, wide field for labor, and I am going to settle down to work," I replied.

"That is right, my friend. But do not go to the gold fields. They are only snares of the evil one for such as you. Go to the cattle stations of the sheep runs; become a drover or a shepherd; save your money, take up land and begin to lead a good and useful life."

"I promised everything he required, and everything else. And he became so well satisfied with me that when we got to London he insisted on seeing me aboard the emigrant ship and recommending me to the special care of the chaplain there.

"The ship sailed the same day, and after a four months' fair voyage reached Melbourne about two weeks ago.

"I loitered about the town for some days, and started on foot for the new gold fields—just to see a novel phase of life, you know."

"Of course I know. But, my lord, I hope in your own interests that you succeeded in bringing over safe, and bestowing safe, the large amount of money and jewelry that—ha! ha! ha!—I am charged with having robbed you!"

"Oh! yes, all but about fifty pounds lodged safely in the Bank of Australia to the credit of Hamilton Gower."

"And now, my lord, will you tell me what became of Henri Delaplaine? He never reappeared in Hawkeville—

fortunately for him, for there was a price on his head as well as on mine."

"The good Mr. Delaplaine walked with me on my road from Hawkewood Hall to Hawkeville Station until we came to the Belle Isle Ferry, when Mr. Delaplaine bade me adieu, thanked me for the hundred-pound note I put in his hand, and got on the ferryboat to cross to the island. I think there was an attraction at the castle in the person of Mademoiselle Labbé, the French lady's maid."

"Labbé disappeared the same day," said Mr. Duplicate Hawke.

"Ah! that explains it. Well, I have never seen or heard of my worthy valet since that notable morning."

"I dare say they are chorus singers on the operatic stage somewhere."

"More than likely. But, Gow, you said that my worthy cousin, Lewis Manton, had succeeded to the title?"

"Certainly, my lord. 'The king is dead! Long live the king!' What else could have happened, after it was found by the coroner's inquest that I had murdered the Earl of Hawkewood, but that his heir presumptive should have succeeded to the title and estates?"

"Yes, but, my good Mr. Duplicate Hawke, the Earl of Hawkewood had given the lie to the coroner's quest verdict by coming to life again and walking out of the French windows, and going about his business. Say, Gow! what happened after your disappearance from that death room?"

"At the Hall, you mean?"

"At the Hall, of course, since you told me what happened to yourself."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! They thought the earl's body had been 'snatched!' Large rewards were offered for its recovery, or for any information that would lead to its recovery! Several medical schools were investigated! The row was at its very height when I left, you must know! I dare say, before this, some body has been found and manipulated, and restored and interred with all the honors as that of the late Horace Hawke, sixteenth Earl of Hawkewood!"

"No doubt. And Lewis Manton reigns at Hawkewood Hall! Well! Let him reign for a year longer, until I have my frolic out and reach my majority! Then I will go back

with you and Delaplaine and my indelible birthmark to claim my rights and eject interlopers!"

"I will return with you, of course, my lord! But how will you be able to lay your hands upon Delaplaine, if you do not know where he went?"

"I have his solemn pledge to meet me at Hawkewood Hall, on my twenty-first birthday. And I know, if he live, he will keep his word! But what movement is that I see among your friends below?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower, as he held a pocket telescope up to his eye, and squinted through it at the party gathered around the watch fire, further down.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE NEW GOLD FIELDS

"I THINK they are preparing breakfast! By the way, their leader, George Travers, is a brother of your parson; but he has never been in Hawkeville, and knows next to nothing of his relations there!"

"Another Cornwall man out here!"

"Lots of them!"

"How small and crowded the earth is, after all! People cannot even go to the Antipodes without meeting other people whom they have either known or heard of!" said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"That is really true; but these men are a good sort. Shall we join them?"

"If you like."

"And since I have told a yarn about a twin brother, and since your lordship does me the distinguished honor to resemble me, shall I introduce you as that esteemed elder twin brother?"

"You may. All men are brethren, for that matter! But in the meantime stow the lordship!"

"Indeed, indeed, I will, my lord! And this is the very last time your lordship's title shall pass my lips until we return to England, when 'the king shall enjoy his own again!' " said Mr. Duplicate Hawke, as he arose and led the

way through the thorny thicket to the camp fire around which his companions were busy getting their rude *al fresco* breakfast.

"Oh! you're back, are you, Hawke! We thought you had deserted us!" exclaimed two or three in the same words, or in words to the same effect.

"Oh, no, mates! I have brought you a valuable recruit! I told Mr. Traverse that I had unexpectedly met a friend from the old country. But little did he suspect—what I hadn't time to explain then—that my 'friend from the old country' was no other than that same honored twin brother of whom I boasted to you all, and of whom I am only the humble 'duplicate!' But you will see what an honest, faithful copy I am when you look upon him! Mates! let me make you acquainted with my elder brother, the son and heir of our distinguished family—Mr. Valentine Hawke."

Mr. Valentine Hawke lifted his hat with a grace all his own, and gave a hand to the extended digits of Mr. George Traverse, who welcomed him in the name of the company.

"Where in the black demons is the can of condensed milk? It is never good for anything unless it is stirred in the pot while the coffee is coming to a boil!" demanded the chief cook of the party, ruthlessly interrupting these courtesies and upsetting everybody in his search for the missing luxury.

The jar was found at last, and the preparations for the breakfast went on to full completion.

Then the party, now increased to nine by the addition of Mr. Valentine Hawke, sat down on the ground to regale themselves with hot coffee, toasted bread and butter, and fried sausages.

None ate of this coarse food with keener relish than the daintily-nourished Mr. Valentine Hawke.

Mr. Duplicate watched him with admiring delight, and surprised him agreeably by suddenly exclaiming:

"You enjoy this sort of life, Brother Val!"

(There was no word of "lordship" now.)

"Greatly," replied Mr. Hawke.

"Ah! Tramping all day and camping all night gives one an appetite, eh?" demanded Mr. George Traverse—"though we reverse the rule by tramping all night and camping all

day! Or, we have done so until this morning. Now, however, I fear that we must tackle that mountain barrier before us by daylight. We could never get over by night," he added.

"Never," assented several of the party.

When the morning meal was over, and the pans and cans and remnants of food were repacked, the party resumed their march.

They soon reached the foot of the mountain and began the ascent.

But who shall describe the dangers and difficulties of their way?

Two circumstances were in their favor. The first one was that the pioneers of the "new rush" who had gone before them had found the pass and cleared the way; the second was, that this way was much less formidable to foot passengers, as they were, than to horsemen or draymen.

Their perilous path was sometimes through an almost impenetrable thicket up the nearly perpendicular front of the mountain, sometimes diverging to the right or left of this along the brink of some fearful chasm, sometimes down the descent of a deep ravine, across the roaring torrent that hurried over the rocks at its bottom, and up the opposite ascent, planting their feet upon its projecting fragments of rock and holding on to the branches of the stunted cedars to assist them in climbing, or to prevent them from falling down to be crushed to death at the foot.

What will not men encounter and endure in the pursuit of gold?

When darkness put a stop to their further progress they sat down to rest near the top of the mountain in the midst of the most savage wilderness that the eye of man or wild beast ever beheld.

Terrific precipices towered over their heads; awful gorges opened at their feet; thorny and stunted thickets bristled all around them.

They lighted a watch fire to keep off beasts or birds of prey, and then, all too tired to prepare supper, each man took a piece of bread and cheese in his hand and stretched himself upon his blanket to rest until day.

Too weary to sleep, some among the party were awake, and so they talked.

"We fell upon the foot trail, but how, in the name of wonder, horse, oxen, and wagons could be got over this barrier, I cannot imagine!" said Mr. Valentine.

"By another route, of course; and then the old miners and teamsters here have devices of which people in civilized countries can form no idea. They are bound to reach a new gold field, and they will reach it," answered Mr. Duplicate, who had been in this region before.

"I should think such a mountain as this would present an impassable barrier."

"Not a bit of it! Wherever man can go the Australian teamster will make his oxen go, and take the dray behind them, when necessary. Why, they patiently stop for days and nights to fell trees and clear a road before them."

"But going up and down these steepes?"

"I'll tell you what an old Australian told me: 'If eight bullocks could not ascend the mountain with a loaded dray, twenty-four bullocks, with a half-loaded dray, might and must.'"

"Well, but in going down these steepes, which seems to be difficult to impossibility, and dangerous to the extent of certain destruction?" inquired Mr. Valentine Hawke.

"Yes, by the law of gravity, one would expect the loaded dray above rather than behind the team to pitch down over the bullocks' heads and drag everything down to ruin. But what does the ingenious driver do? He fells a great tree and hitches it, with all its branches, on behind the dray, and lets it trail as a drag—the best sort of a natural brake, you know. 'Necessity is the mother of invention,' you know. I myself am filled with admiration at the ingenuity, the hardihood and the indomitable perseverance of these men," said Mr. Duplicate Hawke.

"And I give it up and am going to sleep," replied Mr. Valentine, turning over in his blanket and composing himself to rest.

This day, their first on the mountain, is only given as a sample.

The second was like unto it, only a little worse.

The third brought them to the foot of the mountain; but——

Into a pleasant valley, whose beauty, peace, and safety should compensate them for all they had undergone?

No, indeed! Having passed the mountain barrier, they found themselves confronted by a rugged and sterile country, where ridge succeeded gully, and gully followed ridge, for many weary miles.

Here again they fell in with cavalcades of horsemen, trains of wagons, and processions of foot passengers, all bound for the new gold fields.

This was certainly the greatest "rush" that had ever been seen since the first discovery of gold in the great Bathhurst nugget.

All sorts and conditions of people that go to make up the population of a great working city, came to swell this rush—men, women, boys, girls, babies, old and young, swarmed through the wilderness toward the new El Dorado.

These traveled in wagons, on horseback and afoot, in families, in parties, in pairs, or singly.

Among these pilgrims to the shrine of gold were some isolated travelers, who seemed to be strangely out of place.

One was a sturdy, gray-haired, dark-skinned woman, past middle age. She rode on a mule, with panniers each side of her, and seemed to be quite alone.

"Are you going to take up a claim and dig for gold, mother?" inquired Mr. Duplicate Hawke, with jocular good humor, as he found himself by the side of the solitary traveler.

"Bless the man, no," she answered, quite seriously. "Though I do come of mining folk, being Cornwall born, I shouldn't have tried that at my best days! No, lad! But a body must live, and I go to the diggings to make ten times as much by my hands there as I could anywhere else."

"But what can you do?"

"Lad, do you mind there are about a hundred single men here to one who has got a wife and family with him?"

"That is easily seen."

"Well, then, why can't you see consequences as well as objects? I come to cook, wash, iron, and mend for these here poor bachelor bodies; and I allow to make more money nor some of them will make by their gold digging."

"Shouldn't wonder. I never made anything by digging, though I've seen fortunes dug up all around me."

"And lost, lad! See here, honey, I have been following after new rushes ever since the first great rush after the

great Bathurst nugget was found—'cause, you see, it is only on the new fields that I can make my profit. When all the claims get pretty much settled, there's women enough to take the work out'n my hands. The diggers send for their wives, or go and fetch 'em, if they have any, and the bachelors go and get married. But in the new rushes the men come mostly without their families, and stay without them for months, and sometimes for years; so it is in the first months I make my jack. But I began to tell you, honey, how fortunes are lost. The gold diggers mostly do make fortunes; but the liquor sellers and the storekeepers mostly get them. Now, you see that there man there!" she exclaimed, pointing to the other solitary traveler, who seemed to be out of place in this moving crowd.

"I see him, a pale, puny fellow with a small bundle on the end of a stick, and nothing in himself or his equipments to indicate either the digger or the dealer. I wonder what on earth he has come for?"

"To make lots of money, as he has been making ever since the first rush. Like me, he takes after the new rushes."

"But what does he do?"

"Sings and dances. He belonged to the 'Comique' at Melbourne, but makes more money out of the diggers."

"By giving entertainments, at which he is manager, company, ticket taker and treasurer, I suppose?"

"Summat like that," said the woman, as she touched up her mule, by way of hinting that the interview was at an end.

Mr. Duplicate fell back among his own party.

This is only one of the many phases of the new rush.

As the vast and varied procession neared the new fields, it was constantly augmented by wagons, horses, and foot passengers pouring in by way of the rude bush tracks that gave upon the main line of travel.

On the evening of the fourth day the van of the long train, foremost among whom were our friends, Traverse, Hawke, and Duplicate, declared, from all they had learned, that another twenty-four hours of travel would bring them to the new fields.

And with this pleasant prospect in view they kindled their last watch fire, cooked their supper, and after eating

it, stretched themselves upon their blankets and "slept"—a better "sleep" than is often enjoyed even by the "just."

"To-morrow evening, then, we may expect to be at the end of our labors," muttered Mr. Valentine Hawke, as he turned and rolled himself on his side.

"Of these sorts of labors, at least," murmured Duplicate, as he dozed off into sleep.

"And if I bore myself with any other sort——" began Mr. Valentine Hawke, but the sentence was finished in a dream.

There was an early start the next morning.

By dawn of day the whole encampment was up and stirring; by sunrise they were en route again, calling to each other that before sundown they should reach the new fields.

They were now crossing a rugged and sterile country covered with quartz and scantily clothed with a thin and coarse grass that found but little nutriment on that stony ground, and crossed by deep gullies, through which ran rapid streams of water, and by high ridges spiked with a thorny and stunted growth of Australian locust trees.

But their journey was nearer to its end than their most sanguine hopes anticipated.

About ten o'clock in the forenoon, Mr. Valentine Hawke and Mr. Duplicate, being a full eighth of a mile in advance of their comrades, ascended a quartz ridge, and looking down from its highest point, were struck with amazement!

Below them lay a scene, a panorama of life, not to be found anywhere else in the world except in Australia.

They had come unawares upon the marvelous new gold field!

Below them, at the bottom of a deep gully, for a mile or more up and down its banks, were gathered several thousand people of all nationalities, all ages and colors, and both sexes.

There was also a line of hastily constructed huts, tents, cabins, some shops, some dwelling houses, and some taverns.

Beside these there were tilted wagons, that served as temporary shelter for the families who had come in them. And there were bullocks, mules, horses, and even cows, tethered to posts or trees to keep them from straying into the bush. And there were innumerable shafts sunk, like wells, with windlasses above them and two or more men around them.

And down in the depths of the gully, upon the margin of the stream on both sides, were men with tin pans, engaged in gold washing.

Near the strangely constructed habitations there were women and girls engaged in the open air, washing, hanging out clothes, or sewing and minding babies.

Our travelers took in this scene in one astonished glance, and then, congratulating themselves at the unexpected termination of their journey, they began to go down the ridge.

"What does it look like to you?" inquired Valentine of Duplicate Hawke.

"Well, I have been pretty much all over the world, and I never saw anything just like that before. It makes me think of an entire army bivouacking, or an American camp meeting on a grand scale; and yet it is totally unlike either of these scenes," answered the latter.

They rapidly descended the ridge, and making their way cautiously among slunken shafts, tilted carts, and tethered beasts, with a short nod given and returned by the men they passed, entered upon the main street of the mushroom city—if street it could be called where a couple of miles of tents, and canvas huts, and wooden shanties flanked each bank of the great gully, with the rushing stream at its bottom.

They were received with curt nods by the men they met, but they passed directly to a large canvas house with the sign "Hotel" conspicuously painted on the front of it, and there within the canvased walls, with the "bar" on one side, and seats on two, they sat down to await the coming up of their friends.

"What do you think of this sort of life, Val?" inquired Mr. Duplicate Hawke.

"It is amazing! But I do think a week of it will be enough for me. I came to satisfy my curiosity. Then I shall leave you, Dupe. I must see Australia in all its wonderful phases. I must visit its vast sheep runs, its wealthy cattle stations, its other gold diggings, its bush, its 'blacks,' and even its convict penal settlements," replied Mr. Valentine Hawke.

"To do that last, mate, you will have to go to Van Dieman's Land, where you will see the system in all its perfection," said the bartender, putting in his word uncalled for.

"And I shall do so, after I have been over Australia," good-humoredly replied Mr. Valentine Hawke.

A few minutes later the laggards of the party joined them, and they left the tavern and went out to investigate the fields.

Almost the first party they stumbled upon were the Joneses, who were gathered around their tilted wagons and tethered bullocks.

Greetings were exchanged and our party passed on.

Their investigation proved abundantly satisfactory.

George Traverse and Duplicate Hawke entered into partnership and staked out a good "claim," and secured it by the gold digger's simple title deed—which, however, all respected—a pickax stuck into the middle of the space thus marked out.

Of the five remaining men of Traverse's gang, three took a large claim as partners and two a smaller one.

Mr. Valentine Hawke declined to try his "luck" in such ventures. He remained, however, with the gold diggers for two weeks, and at the end of that time availed himself of a carrier's dray that was about to leave the diggings for the city to return to Melbourne.

Before his departure he put a sum of money amounting to about forty-five pounds, in the hands of Mr. Duplicate, and even forced it upon his acceptance, saying:

"You have a right to that much, and much more than that, in compensation for all the damage you have suffered through my whim. You must write to me if you should ever want a friend or a bank note. Here is the address of my bankers at Melbourne. Send your letters there and they will be forwarded to me, wherever I may be; but please remember to direct your letters to Hamilton Gower, by which name I am known to them, and not to Valentine Hawke, which name I prefer to leave behind me in the gold fields."

"All right! I will remember. I hope we may meet again before long," said Mr. Duplicate.

"We must meet, if Heaven wills, at Hawke Hall on the twenty-first anniversary of my birth," replied Mr. Hamilton Gower, as he once more shook hands with Mr. Duplicate Hawke, and went and jumped into the carrier's cart that was waiting for him at a little distance.

And so he left the gold fields to pursue his travels through the wonderful new world of Australia.

The next time we shall meet him will be in the wilds of Van Dieman's Land, and under very startling circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIV

"FOREGATHERED WI' THE DE'IL!"

THE excitement of Hobart Town over the escape of the most notorious desperado in all the convict penal settlements had not abated in the least degree, even when a month had passed since that event.

That little city of the Antipodes, you see, is not like London or New York, where a new sensation of to-day makes us forget that of yesterday.

And, besides, this escape of an atrocious criminal was alarming in its way, as the outbreak of a furious wild beast would have been which was known to be roaming at large through the woods around the town.

No woman or child dared to venture out into the country for fear of encountering this unchained demon.

It was about five weeks since the escape of Jack Hice, when, near the close of a scorching January day (I beg my readers to remember that January weather in Hobart Town corresponds to July weather in New York), a horseman was winding his way through the wilderness of woods that surrounded the base of Mt. Wellington.

This solitary traveler was no other than Mr. Hamilton Gower, as he chose to call himself.

This rather eccentric young gentleman had passed his time, since we saw him last, in traveling over the Australian continent—as so large an island should be called—in his own way.

On foot, or on horseback, in the carriers' drays, or in the bullock drivers' wagons, he had visited every part of that vast and interesting domain, and had seen all its various and strongly contrasted phases of life.

He had made himself acquainted with the young cities and new enterprises of South Australia, Victoria, Queens-

land and New South Wales; he had penetrated into the interior of all these colonies, had been the guest of the hospitable squatters and of the lonely shepherds, had gone over vast cattle stations and sheep runs, had "roughed it" among the gold diggers, both along the beds of rivers and in the ravines of quartz mountains; he had lost himself in the "bush," had lost his money and almost his life among the bushrangers, had been succored by the native blacks—in short, he had passed through adventures enough to fill a large volume; but as these have nothing to do with our story we only allude to them here.

And now he had come to Van Dieman's Land, to investigate the only form of life in this region with which he was unacquainted—the life of the convicts in the penal settlement. He had seen Macquarrie Harbor, Sarah Island, Tasman's Peninsula. He had breakfasted and dined as well as "supped full of horrors" amid these earthly hells.

And, at length, he was making his way on horseback across the country toward Hobart Town, intending to take passage on the first steamer that should stop at that port on its voyage from Melbourne to London.

He was well armed. His experience with the bushmen had taught him to take that much precaution in traveling through the wilderness.

The sun was very low. He knew that, although he could not see it through the thickness of the foliage that surrounded him.

He stopped his horse for a few moments while he took a map and a pocket compass from the breast of his coat and began to examine them to ascertain, if possible, his distance from Hobart Town, and the chances of his reaching his destination before dusk.

While he was thus engaged the deep silence of the solitary desert was broken by piercing shrieks that rang through the forest, startling every living creature in it. The traveler's horse sprang, and was with difficulty controlled, while the shrieks were followed by the agonized cries of a woman.

"Help! Help! Help! Father! Jonas!"

The stalwart traveler threw himself from his rearing horse, snatched his pistol from his breast pocket, cocked it,

and plunged into the thicket from which the cries had come.

Breaking through the brushwood he strode rapidly on. The cries had ceased or been smothered, but a few yards onward he came upon a shocking scene.

A young and beautiful girl was struggling vainly with all her fragile strength to escape from the arms of a hideous monster who held her in a firm grip with his right arm, while he stopped her cries by covering her mouth with his left hand.

Perhaps an older man might have called out:

"Release that lady or I will fire!" and thus given the ruffian a chance for his life.

Our traveler was young, heroic and impetuous, and at the sight of an outrage that filled his soul with rage, disgust and horror, he fired impulsively, and brought the demon down before the wretch could cry for mercy.

The traveler sprang to the spot where the wounded ruffian lay rolling and howling with pain and rage, and tearing up the brushwood and earth with his nails and teeth, and where the beautiful, pale girl sat with disordered dress and disheveled hair, dazed and bewildered, trembling and fainting, scarcely comprehending the nature of her danger, or the fact of her deliverance.

Even at that moment of intense excitement Mr. Hamilton Gower perceived that the lady whom he had rescued was one of the most beautiful beings that the eye of man had ever beheld; with features cast in the purest Grecian mold; with a complexion fair and transparent as the petals of the white japonica; with large, soft, dark eyes, fringed with long, dark lashes, and arched by dark eyebrows; and with a perfect head, covered with an abundance of splendid, golden-hued hair, that fell over her lovely shoulders and white dress like a glittering yellow veil.

Mr. Hamilton Gower bent over her, saying in a low but reassuring voice:

"Do not be frightened. The danger is over. You are quite safe. Quite safe, believe me!"

"Oh! thank you! How can I thank you enough?" faltered the young lady, in a very faint voice.

The terrible howling of the wounded fiend, who rolled

and cursed and tore up the ground a few feet from them, almost prevented conversation.

"Will you permit me to guard you to your home or friends? Are you able to walk? Where shall I take you?" inquired the traveler, bending to the young lady's ear, and speaking very distinctly, that she might catch his words amid the uproar.

"Oh! I do so much thank you! And my father will thank you! Do you—do you not think that poor soul is suffering very much, sir? Is there nothing we can do to relieve him?" inquired the young lady, in a voice softened by compassion.

"Humph! Do angels pity demons in their torments, I wonder! The wretch suffers—deservedly. But I must take you to your home or your friends, young lady. Is it possible that you have a home in this wilderness, or are you out with a party of excursionists, from whom you have been separated?"

"I have a home on the mountain. I will show you the path, and thank you very much for taking me there; and so will my father, I am sure. But can we not do something for that poor man before we go?" inquired the young lady, rising, and walking toward her late assailant.

"Come away!" exclaimed the young man, in a voice more peremptory than polite, as he stepped after her and took her arm and turned her around.

"But why? What harm can come of my going to him? He is suffering, he is disabled, and he may be dying! He would not hurt a fly now!" she answered, in a tone of pity.

"You can do him no good, young lady. Show me the path to your father's house, and I will guard you safely there," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Come along, then, sir. I do thank you, and so will papa! And we can send men and a stretcher to have this poor wounded man brought up to the Hermitage and taken care of," replied the young girl, leading the way out of the thicket.

"Do you know whom you are wasting your compassion upon?" inquired the traveler.

"I know he is a poor soul, suffering the most horrible agonies of mind and body. Oh, sir!" she suddenly broke off and exclaimed: "Do not, I beg you, think me ungrate-

ful to you for saving me! I am, indeed, most grateful! I know you were compelled to shoot that man in order to save me, and I thank you deeply for doing it; yet I cannot help being sorry for the forlorn wretch," she added, looking over her shoulder at the fallen ruffian, who was still rolling and howling and gnashing his teeth.

"I inquired, young lady, if you knew who that man is," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"No, indeed; of course I do not," she replied.

"He is an escaped convict of the worst class, as I know by his yellow uniform and the word 'Felon' stamped upon the back, with 4444," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"I cannot blame them for trying to regain their liberty," replied the young lady.

"Perhaps you cannot blame him for his assault upon an unprotected woman," retorted Mr. Hamilton Gower, who inwardly resented her sympathy with the wounded ruffian.

"Oh, yes, indeed I do! Pray do not misunderstand me, sir. I am not defending the man. I am only pitying him. And surely we may pity the worst of sinners! Ay, and pity them the most," she said, as she continued to lead the way through the pathless woods.

He shrugged his shoulders and followed her in silence, until their way, though still through the thicket, began to ascend.

"We are going up the mountain, I think, though I cannot see a yard before me through the trees," said the traveler at length.

"Yes, we are going up the mountain. My father's house is on the table-land, about halfway to the top."

"Then it must be about two thousand feet above the level!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton Gower, as he followed her through an invisible path so narrow as to oblige them to walk in single file.

"No, not so much, and not more than half so much from where we stand."

"But even at half the distance, what an eyrie perch for a dwelling house!"

"It was my father's fancy, and I like it."

"Is it not difficult to hold communication with the rest

of the world? But pardon me, my interest in the subject had betrayed me into impertinence, I fear."

"Not at all. I will tell you. Papa 'took up' that table-land, and before he could have his house built he had a road made, by which to haul what building materials he needed to the site. He did not need to bring much, for cedar, pine and all good timber, as well as rock, was to be found in abundance on the mountain. He had a sawmill built first of all. And he had a turning lathe. All our furniture and goods up by the same road when it was finished. All the rough labor was performed by convicts hired from the government."

"Has your father many convicts in his employment?" inquired the traveler.

The young lady hesitated for a while, and then slowly and gravely replied:

"He has—one."

"A 'good conduct' felon, I presume?"

"I—hope so," she murmured, in the same tone.

Mr. Hamilton Gower, perceiving that his questions were, for some reason or other, *mal apropos*, relapsed into silence.

As they ascended the mountain the woods became thinner and the trees more stunted in growth.

"This road of which you spoke, is it on this side?" at length inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Yes, and at some points quite near to us; but it is a serpentine road, as you may judge it would have to be on the side of so steep a mountain, and for the use of horses and ox teams. I never go by it. I can always find my way through the woods."

"And do you often extend your walks as far from your house as you have done this evening—at your peril?"

"Oh, often, almost every day when the weather permits. Walking is one of my principal pastimes."

"Is it not dangerous for you to tempt these wilds alone?"

"No! In all the years that I have lived here and wandered in the woods below, I have never met a human being until to-day when I met my assailant and my deliverer. Oh, how providential your arrival was, sir! It would almost seem as if my guardian angel, seeing that dangerous man in my path, had sent you to save me!"

"I should be very much indebted to your guardian angel for the office!" said the young man, warmly.

"You are very kind to say so," answered the girl.

"But I hope you will not venture down in that wilderness again without company or protection," he said, very seriously.

"Oh, no, for although I think there is only about one chance in a million for such a misadventure to happen to me again, yet I would not risk that one," solemnly replied the girl.

The sun had now set, but the glorious "afterglow" of these Southern sunset skies still illumined the heavens and the earth.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MYSTIC MOUNTAIN HOME

THEY now came in sight of a spacious, white mansion, built in the midst of beautifully terraced and ornamented grounds on the table-land above them.

A long flight of steps cut in the solid rock led them up to the lowest terrace, which was carpeted with green grass and shaded with trees, and traversed by flagstone walks edged with continuous lines of rose bushes, and flanked here and there by arbors and rustic seats.

Passing across this terrace by its sinuous walks they came to a short flight of half a dozen stone steps leading up to the second terrace, which was laid out in parterres of flowers, bordered with hedges of box, between which wound white gravel walks that shone like pebbles of pearl in sands of silver.

Passing across this by the gleaming serpentine paths, they ascended by another flight of marble steps to the third terrace immediately in front of the house.

This terrace was the crowning glory of the grounds. It was laid out in grass plots bordered with low hedges of flowers and shrubs of the most exquisite beauty and delicious fragrance. In the center of each plot stood a group of statuary, gleaming whitely from the green foliage of a clump of trees; or else an elegant arbor, overgrown with

creeping vines and climbing roses; or, finally, a fountain whose bright waters sang as they rose and fell, splashing in their marble reservoir below.

"What a charming place! An oasis in the desert! A paradise in the midst of purgatory! This must have been the work of fairies!" exclaimed the youthful traveler, in a burst of enthusiasm.

"No, it was the work of convicts," said the young lady, very gravely, as she led the way up to the house.

It was an oblong building with a white marble front, and many windows opening upon piazzas that extended from end to end of every story from basement to mansard roof. It stood against a near background of cedar trees, whose dark-green foliage threw out into radiant relief the gleaming white walls of the mansion.

The young lady led her companion up a flight of broad, marble steps to a long piazza, whose marble pillars were twined with running roses, and across that to a pair of double doors constructed of panels of beautifully contrasted woods, and standing about the middle of the length of the house, and having four French windows on each side.

The young lady opened this door and admitted her visitor into a spacious hall whose floor was laid in octagons of rare woods, and whose walls were covered with artistic paintings in fresco.

Bamboo chairs and lounges, of luxurious construction for ease and coolness stood in convenient places. A spiral staircase, strong as a tower of iron, yet light as the flight of a sparrow, led up to the stories above.

Many doors of cedar wood opened on all sides to the numerous suits of rooms.

The whole was lighted by a stained glass window in the roof, which poured a flood of rosy radiance over the scene. There seemed to be no porter or footman in attendance.

The young lady herself opened a door on the right, and motioned her visitor to enter.

He obeyed her, and found himself in a spacious summer room, which, by its furniture and appointments, might have belonged to a house in China or Japan rather than to that of an English colonist in Tasmania.

The walls were covered with Japanese silk, the floor with Chinese matting. The chairs and lounges were of bamboo

work, the tables and stands of Japanese inlaid woods; the curtains at the windows were of Japanese silk; the ornaments on the mantelpiece and on the brackets and stands were Chinese monsters and Japanese boxes.

And not only the room, but the sole occupant of the room, attracted the attention of the stranger, who had an abundant opportunity for observation, as will be seen.

The sole inmate was a noble-looking old man, with a smooth, fair face, a beardless chin and long gray hair, which parted in the middle above a fine forehead, fell in long waves down over his shoulders.

He was wrapped around in a long, flowing dressing gown of India silk, and he was reclining back in his bamboo rocking chair, fast asleep.

"Ah! He is taking his afternoon nap! But it must be nearly over now, for it is evening. Sit here, sir, if you please, while I go and speak to him," said the young lady, as she led her companion to a seat beside the window at a distance from the one occupied by the old man.

Mr. Hamilton Gower bowed and sat down.

The young lady went up to the old man, bent over him and pressed her lips to his brow.

This gentle salute awoke him.

"Ah, my angel child! Is it you? Have you returned? But you are later than usual, my darling," he said, drawing her down upon his lap and passing his arm around her waist.

"Yes, father, love; but I have had an adventure," she answered, looking in his kind, brown eyes with a smile that was intended to allay any fears that her words might have aroused.

"An adventure, Seraph! What adventure, my child?" demanded the old man, with an uneasiness that might have been anxiety but for the reassuring smile on his daughter's lovely face.

"Yes, father, love. I met an escaped convict, and he—was rude to me——"

"Seraph!" exclaimed the old man, growing paler than his wont.

"But he did not hurt me, father, love! He only frightened me—and—and—then, opportunely, providentially, a

gentleman traveler came up and brought me safe home. Will you see him and thank him for me, father, love?"

"Seraph! This is a very strange story you are telling me! How was the bushranger rude to you?"

"He frightened me, father, love, with his rough speech and manner."

"And who was the gentleman who brought you home?"

"I do not know, father, love!—a very kind, brave man. He is here. Will you see him and thank him for me now?"

"Yes, my darling! And learn from him more of this adventure than you seem able to tell me. Bring the gentleman here, Seraph."

"Will you come and see my father, sir?" inquired the young lady, looking up and smiling upon the stranger, who from the other end of the room had heard every word of this short conversation.

Mr. Hamilton Gower came immediately, stood before the old gentleman, and bowed.

"My dear father, this is the gentleman who brought me home. Sir, this is my father, Mr. Theobald Elfinstar," said the young lady, presenting the stranger.

Mr. Hamilton Gower bowed deeply.

"I am happy to see you, my dear sir, and to have this opportunity of expressing my profound gratitude for the service you have rendered my daughter—a service much greater, I know, than she, in her ignorance, even suspects. I beg you, sir, to tell me the name of one whom I shall remember in my prayers to the latest hour of my life," said Mr. Elfinstar, with much emotion.

The stranger hesitated for a moment, and then in a reckless, offhand manner, replied:

"My name is Gower. Hamilton Gower. But indeed, my dear sir, you vastly over-estimate the little service I have been so happy as to render Miss Elfinstar——"

"Enough, my good young sir. It is graceful of you to express yourself as you do. But the fact remains the same. You have saved my Seraph from death, or a fate worse than death. We are hermits here, and our society is not very enlivening; but I hope, as you are a traveler, that if your business elsewhere is not very urgent, you will honor us with your company here as long as you can endure our

dullness. We will do all we can to make it less dull for you."

"You are very good. I thank you very much. For to-night, at least, I shall be happy to avail myself of your hospitality," replied the traveler, with a bow.

"It is settled, then; nor shall we let you depart in the morning, or next day, or next week, without an effort to detain you," said Mr. Theobald Elfinstar, with a genial smile, as he touched a bell-pull in the chimney corner.

A young servant man, out of livery, answered the summons.

"Tell Jones to saddle a good horse and come around here for orders," said the host.

The boy bowed and departed.

"And now, my young friend, tell me where I can send for your luggage," said Mr. Elfinstar.

The visitor laughed.

"My luggage consists of a pair of saddlebags across the back of my 'good gray steed,' and where he is it would be very hard to tell. I left him rearing and plunging in the blind path when I threw myself out of my saddle and rushed into the thicket at the cry of this young lady."

Mr. Elfinstar looked from the speaker to his daughter in great distress.

"Don't worry yourself, father, love. I told you the man frightened me, but he did not hurt me, really," said Seraph, with a smile.

"Your horse, I fear, is lost, sir; but I will send a groom in search of him. Seraph, my child, where did this misadventure occur?"

"In the Iron Oak Dell, by the Fairy's Spring," answered the young lady.

"I will give orders for the place to be searched for the horse and saddlebags. In the meantime, sir, my stables and my wardrobe, as well as my house, are most heartily at your service," said the old gentleman.

The guest bowed his acknowledgments.

"And, father, love, while you are sending, I wish you would send a stretcher down by four men to bring that poor soul up to the house, so that he may be properly attended to," said the young lady.

"What poor soul, Saraph? What are you talking about, my child?" inquired the old gentleman.

"That poor man who frightened me, father, love. He is wounded and lying on the bare ground, alone and unaided. He may die for want of help if he is not brought here as quickly as possible."

Mr. Elfinstar looked from his daughter to his visitor in alarm.

"I was obliged to shoot the ruffian. There was no time for a parley," said the traveler.

"Ah! I suspect there was deeper deviltry in this affair than I have been told," said Mr. Elfinstar.

"Indeed, no, there is not, dear father. I am not in the least hurt. There is not a bruise or a scratch about me," said Seraph, with a smile.

"I know that you are not hurt, my precious! The fact of my living to say so should prove to you that I know you are safe. If harm should come to you now, my Seraph, death would come to me."

"And since I am unhurt, you will send for that poor, wounded man to be brought here and nursed?" inquired the young lady.

"Yes, I will send for him."

"Immediately, father, love! Consider, he has already lain on the ground more than two hours."

"My love, wounded heroes have lain on the battlefield days and nights before they could be found and carried off, and yet they have recovered and got well. But I will send for this disabled rascal, and after I have got him here I will notify the authorities."

"Father, love!"

"It will be my most imperative duty to do so, Seraph. I have no doubt that this demon is no other than the notorious criminal, Jack Hice, of whose escape from the chain gang Jonas brought us word from the town."

Whatever the merciful spirit of the girl might have prompted her to reply, was arrested on her lips by a rap at the door.

A long, lean, sallow, hollow-cheeked and high-nosed man, whose large ears stuck out from his head like the handles of a jar, and whose thin, red hair hung straggling down

over his gray coat collar, entered the room with a low bow, and said:

"If you please, sir, I have saddled Pennywhistle and come for orders."

"Very well; but there must be some little change in the intended program. Your business is to go down to the Iron Oak Thicket and search for a saddled horse with a pair of saddlebags, and to bring them to this place. But before you leave the premises, return to the stables and take a cot—I suppose one of the grooms can lend you one for the occasion—and select four of the strongest men and instruct them to carry that cot down by the road to the Iron Oak Thicket, and then go through to the Fairy Spring Dell and pick up a wounded man whom they will find there, and lay him on the cot and bear him here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, Jonas, tell them to bear him slowly and carefully, because he is in great pain," added the young lady.

"Yes, miss."

A pause.

"Any more orders, sir?"

"Not any."

"Any more orders, miss?"

"No, Jonas."

"Go on with you! The horse may be lost and the man dead before you move!" exclaimed his master.

Jonas bowed to the ground and departed.

"Stay! Come back here!" called Mr. Elfinstar.

"There! I knew there was to be more orders! There always is. I, all the time, have to turn back, and it is unlucky to turn back!" grumbled the man, half audibly, as he returned to the room.

"On your way out send Sammy here," said the old gentleman.

"Yes, sir; any more orders, sir?"

"No."

"Sure, sir?"

"I have no more orders, you blockhead! Go!"

Jonas bowed again and withdrew.

His exit was followed soon by the entrance of the boy who had first answered the bell.

"I want your attendance, Sammy. Follow me and this gentleman. Come, Mr. Gower, I will show you your room."

And the old gentleman arose and left the parlor, followed by his guest and his servant.

He led his guest to a pleasant bedchamber immediately over the parlor they had left, and whose two windows commanded a view of the front terraces, the declivity of the mountain, the wooded valley below, through the midst of which wound the Derwent River, and of the range of mountains whose summit were lost in the clouds of the distant horizon.

The windows were shaded with white linen blinds and draped with white muslin; the floor covered with matting, and the walls simply whitewashed. The bedroom set of furniture was of white enameled wood, and the bed itself was covered with a white counterpane.

Pure, clean and cool was the aspect of the place, suggesting the bower of a young girl; yet the host said to his guest:

"This is my bedroom, sir. I have brought you here first, because——"

He paused and went to a bureau and drew out a drawer, leaving it open; thence to a wardrobe and unlocked the doors, leaving them open, and finally to a door leading to a bathroom and dressing room, leaving it open.

"Because," he resumed, "there is everything requisite for your toilet. I beg you will accept all, as frankly and simply as it is offered."

"I thank you. You are very kind," replied Mr. Hamilton Gower, with a bow.

"The boy here will wait on you and answer your bell while you give us the happiness of your company. Supper will be ready at eight—not dinner. We keep old-fashioned hours at the Hermitage—breakfasting at eight, dining at two and supping at eight," added the old gentleman, as he left.

"'Old-fashioned hours,' quotha! Why, they are historical hours—antediluvian hours!" laughed Mr. Hamilton Gower, as he proceeded, with the help of "the boy," to shell off his coat, vest, etc.

However, the young traveler need not have been critical,

for he had known no more fashionable hours since his arrival in the Australian colonies.

After the first good bath he had enjoyed for many days the young gentleman encased himself in a full suit of his host's clothes, which, if they were not a perfect fit in all respects, did very well in an emergency.

Then he went downstairs, attended by his boy, who opened a door on the left side of the hall and admitted him into a long drawing-room, which impressed him at first sight as a vista of moonlight on snow.

In fact, the room was upholstered entirely in white and silver; the walls covered with white paper lighted up by silver stars; the windows draped with white muslin, supported by silver cornices; the floor covered by a Chinese cloth of white ground with silver flowers; the sofas and chairs of silver-plated frames were covered with white, silver-flowered silk; the tables and stands of white marble were supported on silver-plated pedestals; the mirrors were framed in silver-plated frames; the statuettes that stood on the marble stands or brackets were also of marble. The only bits of color in the room were from the fragrant flowers that filled the alabaster vases, or from the richly mounted, illustrated volumes that lay on the marble tables.

This was evidently the summer drawing-room of this comfortably arranged house.

There was no one in the room.

Mr. Gower, in his fresh toilet, his spotless white linen coat and pantaloons, felt quite in harmony with his surroundings.

He went to one of the vases, took a crimson moss rosebud from among its flowers and set it in his buttonhole.

Then he went to the book table and picked up "Thompson's Seasons," bound in crimson and gold and beautifully illustrated.

While he was looking over its pages, and just as his eyes had lighted on the lines,

"Come, gentle spring, ethereal mildness, come!"

the door opened, and Spring herself, embodied in the form of his young hostess, entered the room.

He stepped forward to meet her, and as he took her hand

to lead her to a seat he thought he never had seen so fair a vision. We have before described her classic features, her fair, transparent, blooming complexion, her large, soft, pathetic, dark eyes, shaded by their long lashes and arched by their dark eyebrows, and her wealth of yellow, golden hair, which was now carried back from her sweet, low forehead by a bandeau of pearls and flowed in rippling wavelets down over her shoulders. She wore a trained dress of white silk, embroidered down the front, around the borders and on the edges of her short sleeves and low neck. Strings of pearls adorned her lovely bare arms and bosom. And she wore white kid gloves like a London belle.

"I hope you will not find it very dull here, Mr. Gower," she said.

"Dull!" he repeated, in a tone and with a look that he could not control, although it was early in the day of their acquaintance to betray the deep interest he was already beginning to take in this fair and gentle creature.

She seated herself on the sofa to which he had led her, and, with a gesture as simple as a child's, signed for him to sit beside her.

"We live within ourselves—too much within ourselves—and, while we rejoice in the presence of a visitor, we know that you must find life very monotonous at the Hermitage," she added.

The entrance of his host interrupted the *tête-à-tête*.

Mr. Elfinstar politely hoped that his guest felt rested and refreshed, and was reassured by the latter upon that point.

Then a servant appeared at the door and announced supper.

"Come, sir," said the old gentleman, rising.

Mr. Gower arose, and, with a courtly grace never learned in the wilds of Tasmania, offered his arm to Miss Elfinstar and led the way from the room.

A dainty and well-served repast awaited them in the cool and fragrant dining-room. In addition to the more substantial fare, there was a great variety of the most delicious tropical fruit, fresh and preserved.

To the gratification of his host, the traveler made an excellent supper.

Half an hour later, when they were all seated on the front piazza, enjoying the delicious coolness and fragrance

of the summer moonlit night, and viewing from their commanding height the magnificent face of the mountain and dip of the valley, a man came up to the steps and stood and bowed.

In his tall, lank form Mr. Hamilton Gower recognized Jonas Stackpole.

"Well?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar.

"Well, sir, I have got the brute and the saddlebags, and a chase I had! But the animal had tired himself out with his capers and was willing enough to let me lead him home. Saddlebags and beast both in the stable, sir," the man explained.

"Quite right; but you must bring the saddlebags around to the house."

"Yes, sir."

"And what of the wounded man, Jonas?" inquired the young lady.

"They found him just where the master said, miss, by the Fairy Spring. I went along with them and helped to lift him up and lay him on the cot, and they are a-bringing him along by the road."

"He is still living, then?"

"I should just think he is, miss. He was quiet when we first reached the ground, but when I stooped down to look at him and asked him how he felt himself, he began to cuss up and down and through and through enough to make my hair stand up straight on my head. I wouldn't go a-nigh him, if I was you, miss. His langgurwage ain't fit for no lady to hear," added the man.

"Was he suffering much?" inquired Seraph.

"No more than he deserves, miss. I'd bet my pile on that, if I had a pile to bet. He was thusty, miss; and after cussin' of me uphill and down dale, in langgurwage of the wust sort, he ordered of me to bring him a drink of water, which I went and dipped my hat full and give it to him—for the good Lord's sake, not for hizzen, you may be sure," added the man.

"There, that is enough, Jonas. Go and bring the saddlebags to the house," said his master.

"Yes, sir. Any more orders?"

"No."

"Sure there's none?"

"I am quite sure. Be off!"

The groom went his way, and was not on this occasion recalled again.

As the man disappeared along the path leading to the stables, a procession appeared coming up the avenue—four men carrying a cot by the four corners, and upon the cot a fifth man, stretched out as if he were dead. He was certainly quiet enough now.

Miss Elfinstar impulsively started to go and meet the procession.

"Come back, Seraph. Go into the house. This is no place for you," said her father.

The girl immediately obeyed.

"Go with her, Mr. Gower. I will attend to this matter," continued the old gentleman.

"I hope you will call me, sir, if I can be of the least service," said the guest.

"I thank you, yes, certainly."

Mr. Hamilton Gower willingly followed the young lady, whom he found in the summer drawing-room, standing at one of the front windows, looking out.

"Your father sent me after you," he said, with a smile, as he took his place at her side, "and I only wish that all the commands that shall ever be laid on me during the whole course of my future life may be as agreeable as Mr. Elfinstar's."

"Is this miserable man dead, do you think? He was very still," said the young girl, quite unaffectedly ignoring the young gentleman's compliment.

"I really cannot tell you; but if he should be dead, why should it concern you, my dear Miss Elfinstar?" inquired Hamilton Gower, with just a shade of annoyance in his tone.

"I do not know," she answered, humbly; "but I hope he may get well to lead a better life before he leaves this world," she added.

Then they both fell into silence, for they heard the slight noise made by the men in lifting the cot with the wounded man upon it up the steps onto the piazza, and through the front door.

"Bring him into this back room, and set him down here. It would give him too much pain to attempt to carry him

up these stairs," said the voice of Mr. Elfinstar, as they bore the cot through the hall toward the rear of the house.

"He is not dead, then. I am so glad! He may live to recover," said Seraph.

"To what purpose, my dear young lady?" gravely inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"To redeem his past—to live a better life," replied Seraph.

"To break into a few more houses; to rob a few more banks; to cut a few more throats, and finally die on a scaffold instead of on a cot," amended Mr. Gower.

Seraph covered her face with her hands, and bowed her head upon her breast.

The young gentleman regarded her in silence and sorrow for a few minutes, and then said:

"I have offended you. I am a sad ruffian, I am afraid; but I have been traveling for the past year among a rough set of men. I beg your pardon, Miss Elfinstar."

"You have not offended me in the least," she answered, dropping her hands and raising her head; "but what you have been saying is so horrible!" she added, with a shudder.

"I know it. You had just as well have been exposed to the blasphemies of our friend on the cot as to my entertaining conversation," he answered, in a self-accusing tone.

What further might have been said was prevented by the appearance of Mr. Elfinstar, who came in and said:

"I think the man will die, though not immediately. I have sent a groom on a fresh horse to Hobart Town to fetch a surgeon, though I do not suppose that one can possibly get here before the morning. Do not look so distressed, my Seraph! Death is the best possible thing that could happen to the poor wretch at this time. Come, sir. Will you come in and see him?" inquired the old gentleman.

Mr. Hamilton Gower turned with a bow to accompany his host.

They passed out of the drawing-room and down the hall to a back parlor plainly furnished, with straw matting on the floor, linen shades at the windows, and cane chairs and sofas.

In the middle of the room stood the cot upon which was stretched the dying man, his head upon a clean pillow, his form covered by a white counterpane. His face had been

washed and his hair combed, and his wretched convict suit exchanged for a clean set of underclothes. He was lying quite still, with his eyes closed and his bloodless face looking ghastly white in contrast to his jet-black hair, eyebrows and short beard of about five weeks' growth.

The two gentlemen stood gazing silently upon him.

The light of a hanging lamp fell full upon the scene.

Hamilton Gower, who had not seen the face of the man distinctly at the time he shot him in the thicket, now gazed upon him with a changing color and sickening heart.

Not because the wretch was then dying of a wound inflicted by his own hand, though that circumstance affected him more deeply than he would have confessed, even to himself.

"I have given him forty drops of laudanum in two ounces of brandy, and the treatment has somewhat lulled his pain and revived his fainting strength," said Mr. Elfinstar.

At the sound of voices, the dying man slowly lifted his heavy lids and fixed a pair of large, black eyes full upon the face of the younger man, who now started violently, exclaiming:

"Ham Gow! Heaven of heavens! Ham Gow!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A DEATHBED REVELATION

"HAM GOW! Is it possible that I find you in this condition?" demanded Mr. Gower, in a tone of great mental distress, as he bent over the wounded man, who just stared stupidly for an instant and then, with a sigh, closed his eyes.

"You know this man, then, sir?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, in some surprise.

"Yes, I recognize him now as a man I have known from boyhood in the old country, and for a short time in these colonies also," gravely and sadly replied Mr. Gower.

"And I judge from your words and manner that you have just recognized him—that you did not know him when you shot him?"

"No, I did not. And now I feel deeply grieved to have found him in this manner."

While his guest was speaking, Mr. Elfinstar looked intently on his face and then on that of the man on the bed.

"You are enough like one another to be brothers," he said, at length.

"The likeness has been often noticed in our native country," replied Mr. Gower.

"Enough alike to be brothers," repeated the old gentleman. "I beg your pardon, sir, but there are brothers and brothers," he added.

"Is this man sleeping or comatose?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"He is under the influence of the opium I have given him. I must sit up with him to-night to watch its further effects. I hope the doctor will arrive early to-morrow morning," said Mr. Elfinstar.

"Is it necessary that he should be watched to-night?" inquired the guest.

"Can you ask, young sir? Of course it is absolutely necessary."

"I did not know. I have had no experience in these matters. But since you say it is so, I will sit up with him myself, Mr. Elfinstar."

"But, my dear young friend, I cannot permit you to do anything of the sort. You are just off a long journey. You require rest. You must go to bed and sleep."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Elfinstar. I cannot go to bed. I cannot sleep. I shall not leave this room. Here lies the poor companion of my boyhood, slain by my own hand, dying before my own eyes. Say that he was justly sacrificed, that he was a felon, who met his fate while attempting to commit another crime; yet the facts remain the same. He was the playmate of my boyhood, and he has fallen, however justly, necessarily, inevitably—he has fallen by my hand, and I must not and will not desert his deathbed!"

"Oh, if you look at it in that light I have nothing more to say."

"Understand me, Mr. Elfinstar. I do not regret having shot this man, under the circumstances. I only regret the existence of the circumstances that compelled me to do so."

"I comprehend, my dear young friend. You are perfectly right."

"Then I hope that when your usual bedtime arrives you will retire to rest, sir, and leave him to my care."

"My bedtime has arrived, Mr. Gower; so if you are resolved to sit up with him, I will just give you a few simple rules for his treatment during the night, and I will direct one of the menservants to bring a mattress into the back entry out there, and lie down within call, if you should need him."

"Thank you, Mr. Elfinstar. Tell me now what I am to do. I will be careful to obey directions."

"Here, then, on this table is a bowl of ice, a pitcher of water, a cup of beef tea, a bottle of brandy, a vial of laudanum and a spirit lamp. Warm the beef tea over the spirit lamp, and give it to him from time to time. If he should be restless, give him thirty drops of laudanum in half a wineglassful of brandy—unless he should be feverish, in which case give him the laudanum in water instead of in brandy. If his head should be hot, bathe it in ice water, and keep napkins wet with the same on his forehead. If you should want assistance, call Aaron, the man whom I shall leave in the hall to attend your orders. But if you should need counsel, send him to call me. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I will say good-night," said the old gentleman, as he arose to leave the room.

"Good-night to you, sir," courteously replied the young man, who, as soon as he was left alone, closed the door and seated himself in the easy-chair by the bedside.

The patient slept quietly.

Mr. Hamilton Gower, leaning back in his chair, with closed eyes, heard the subdued noises of the servants engaged in closing the doors and windows of the house as cautiously as they could, to avoid disturbing the wounded and sleeping man.

Finally he heard the man whom Mr. Elfinstar had left as a night attendant lay down his mattress in the entry and let himself drop upon it.

Then all was silent.

He listened, if perchance he might hear the step or the voice of Seraph Elfinstar.

But he heard nothing of the sort.

And he had not bidden her good-night! He had come out of the drawing room at the request of her father to see the wounded man, and had left her standing at the window.

He had certainly expected to return to her side, and to have finished the evening in her company; but instead of doing so he had suffered himself to be beguiled into close attendance upon the patient.

He felt as if he had been cheated out of the pleasure of her society, and even out of the privilege of bidding her good-night.

But, at all events, he knew that he should see her in the morning, and that she would warmly approve his action in taking care of the wounded man during the night.

His task was not a very hard one; indeed, the patient was so quiet, and the household so still, that Mr. Hamilton Gower, leaning back in his chair, dozed lightly—so lightly that he heard the very breathing of his patient.

After two hours the breathing became sighing, and the watcher arose and looked over the sleeper, and examined his features by the lowered light of the hanging lamp.

The latter opened his black eyes and looked full into those other black eyes bending over him.

"How do you feel by this time, Ham?" inquired Mr. Gower.

"What in the furies do you mean by calling me Ham?" demanded the wounded brute, with a savage scowl.

"Mr. Duplicate Hawke, then! How do you feel?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"You are a lunatic! Let me alone!" growled the wounded ruffian, making an attempt to turn away from his nurse; but instead of doing so he uttered a howl of pain and sank down upon his back again.

Mr. Gower arose and measured out thirty drops of laudanum in a wineglass, filled it half full of brandy, and put it to the lips of the sufferer, saying:

"Drink this; it will relieve you."

He got a sniff of the brandy and swallowed it eagerly, sighing with satisfaction as he muttered:

"Ah-h-h! That's the right sort!"

"Lie still and try to sleep now, Ham," said his nurse.

"There you are again! Who in Hades is Ham?" growled the patient.

"Ah! I beg your pardon again, Mr. Duplicate Hawke," said the watcher.

"And who in a legion of demons is Mr. Doublecake All? You are an idiot or a lunatic—one or t'other!" growled the man.

"Come, come, Ham Gow——" began the nurse; but, suddenly think that contradiction might excite and injure his patient, he stopped short.

"'Ham Gow!' You're the third person as has called me that name in the last six weeks! What in the foul fiend do you mean by—— Oh-h-h!" The man suddenly broke off, and groaned with pain.

"You had better not try to talk. To do so causes you to suffer. Lie still and the opiate you have taken will put you to sleep," said Mr. Gower.

"I'd like to get hold of that cove who emptied his revolver into my insides!" growled the ruffian, grinding his teeth.

It was clear that, owing to the change of dress and appearance, together with the change of place and circumstances, the convict had failed to recognize in his gentlemanly attendant the rough wayfarer who had shot him.

And, though Mr. Hamilton was a truthful man, he did not deem it wise on this occasion to enlighten his patient, as such enlightenment would not have conduced to the benefit of the latter.

He warmed some beef tea over the spirit lamp, and persuaded the wounded man to swallow a few spoonfuls.

Then the convict lay back on his pillow and murmured:

"I wonder whatever makes people call me Ham—what is it?"

"Ham Gow. And they call you so because you once went by that name, whatever you may call yourself now," replied Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"See here, mister, you're all wide of the mark; though I reckon I must look like that cove, or so many people would not mistake me for him. Give me a drop of brandy. I feel weak as a rat!"

Before complying with the man's request, Mr. Gower put

his hand on the patient's head. Finding it free from fever, he poured out half a glass of brandy and gave it to him.

"That's the right sort!" breathed the patient, with a sigh of satisfaction.

Mr. Gower, who now began to doubt seriously whether the counterpart before him was the genuine Ham Gow, would have liked to ask questions, but refrained for fear of exciting and injuring his patient.

The convict, however, was not disposed to keep silence. Stimulated and strengthened by the brandy and the beef tea, he felt inclined to talk.

"What made you call me Ham—what's-his-name?" he again demanded.

"I have already told you—because I believe you to be Ham Gow," answered Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"You do?"

"Yes, I do."

"You really do?"

"Yes, I really do! And I much wonder why you should try to play off this deception upon me, a man who has known you intimately from your infancy upward!" said Mr. Gower.

The poor convict put his hand up to his head with a puzzled look and reflected.

"I wonder if I have gone light-headed!" he murmured. "For I'm sure I don't remember ever to have seen this gentleman before in all the days of my life, though he says he has known me from boyhood!"

Mr. Gower began to lose confidence in his own convictions.

"If you are not Ham Gow, who on earth are you?" he could not help asking, even though the question should throw his patient into a fever.

"A cove that looks extremely like him, I suppose, since I have been taken for him in both hemispheres——"

"You have?"

"Yes, sir! First time, had to leave England in a hurry one morning; got aboard a fishing smack and offered the skipper twenty pounds to forego his fishing for that week and take me over to the coast of France. Skipper accepted offer and called me Ham Gow for the whole trip. I didn't

let on as I was anybody else. I didn't care what he called me, so he didn't call me back to England."

"Oh-h-h!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton Gower, as the light began to break in upon his mind.

"Second time, nearly a month after that, came back to England, thinking to get off to America, but was nabbed by the charlies—not for myself, but as Ham Gow, the demon chaw him! And I was kept in prison until some officer found me out to be—somebody else. And then I was kept in prison on my own account, and finally sent out here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Third time, about six weeks ago, I was working in the chain gang on the road when up comes a young woman, looks me in the face, screeches, 'Ham Gow!' and goes off into the 'high strikes.' "

"Umph!" muttered Mr. Gower.

"And, fourth and last time—as yet!—here comes you, whom I never saw before in all the days of my life, telling me to my face that I am Ham Gow, and must be Ham Gow, whether or no, and that you have known me ever since I was a child!"

"You certainly bear a most extraordinary likeness to the man you have been taken for; but, since you are not he, who are you?"

"That is none of your business, my fine gentleman. Give me some brandy; I am getting faint again."

"I am afraid to give you any so soon again. It might raise your fever."

"Fever be blowed! I'm as cold as ice, and as weak as water! Feel my head! Feel my pulse! There, don't be an idiot! Give me the brandy."

The sinking man spoke faintly, yet vehemently.

Mr. Hamilton Gower poured out a half glass of brandy and gave it to his patient.

"I am very glad that you are not the man I mistook you for! I was deeply grieved and shocked to think that Ham Gow, my boyhood's old friend, should have——"

Mr. Hamilton Gower stopped short in his impulsive speech. He would not willingly wound the feelings of a felon on his deathbed.

"Done such a thing as I did, eh? Well, now, don't you go off at a tangent! I never meant to harm a hair of that

young girl's head. I ain't that sort. I only wanted the gold chain off her neck and the diamond drops out of her ears; but she was so scared that she wouldn't hear reason, and screeched so I had to stop her mouth. I wouldn't have hurt her willingly, and I am glad she's not hurt—— Say, mister, I'm very faint! Feel my pulse! Am I dying?" panted the sinking man.

"You are exhausting yourself. You must not say another word. I will give you a little more laudanum in some brandy, and you must try to go to sleep," answered his nurse, who then poured out and administered the opiate.

This new dose, together with what he had already taken, soon overpowered his nervous excitement, and he grew quiet and at length fell fast asleep.

His attendant smoothed the disordered bedclothes, and then settled himself in his easy-chair to rest.

In the deep silence of the time and place he faintly heard a distant clock—probably the kitchen timepiece—strike the hour—three o'clock.

"Thank Heaven, it is near morning, and the sun will rise in less than two hours!" he said; and, reclining back in his chair, he fell into a light doze, through which he heard the least movement made by his patient—very quiet movements, only such as might be made by one sleeping peacefully.

And so the watcher dozed while the patient slumbered until day broke, morning dawned, the sun arose, and the household began to stir.

Then the watcher awoke, but not the patient.

Mr. Hamilton Gower roused himself, yawned, arose and bent over the wounded man.

The latter was sleeping profoundly and breathing regularly.

Mr. Gower laid his hand on the sleeper's forehead.

It was rather hot, dry, and feverish; so Mr. Gower soaked a napkin in ice water and laid it on that forehead, muttering to himself the while:

"I fear I gave him too much brandy, but what was I to do? I could not let the fellow die of nervous exhaustion. I wish the doctor would come."

The doctor did not answer to this wish, but some one else came.

The door opened, and old Mr. Elfinstar, wrapped in his Japanese flowered silk dressing gown, entered the room and came softly up to the bedside, whispering his question :

"How is our patient?"

"He is sleeping, as you see, but he is feverish," replied the young man.

"I knew, of course, that if he should live through the night he would be feverish this morning. How did he pass the night?"

"Restlessly until I gave him the second dose of laudanum, since which time he has slept quietly," answered Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Now, then, my young friend, I will relieve your watch, if you will go to your room and lie down and sleep," said the old gentleman.

"I thank you, Mr. Elfinstar, but really I could not sleep, even if I should lie down, and I have no desire to do either. I feel anxious to hear the doctor's report of this case. When do you suppose he will be here?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"We may expect him very soon, I think. At any rate, my young friend, though you will not lie down and go to sleep, you may, at least, go to your room and refresh yourself with a bath, and by the time you get through breakfast will be ready," suggested the old gentleman.

"I think I will take your advice," said Mr. Hamilton Gower, rising and giving up his position to his host, who immediately took it.

Mr. Gower went to his room, attended by "the boy" who had been appointed to serve him, and whom he found waiting at the foot of the stairs.

He took a bath, changed his dress, brushed his jet-black hair and beard and went down to the breakfast room into which he was ushered by "the boy," and where he found Miss Elfinstar seated before the tea urn at the head of the table.

She was prettily attired in a pale-blue Japanese silk wrapper, and her fair, golden-hued hair was bound back by a pale-blue ribbon, and flowed, as usual, down over her graceful shoulders.

Mr. Hamilton Gower bowed deeply as he entered her

presence, and offered his hand as he approached her and bade her good-morning.

"My father says that you were so kind as to sit up with the wounded man last night. How is he this morning?" inquired the young lady, when these salutations had passed between them.

"He is sleeping, or he was when I left him half an hour ago. He has some fever, however, this morning," replied the young gentleman.

"That is quite natural under the circumstances. Father expected as much," said Miss Elfinstar.

As she spoke the old gentleman entered the room.

"Ah, Mr. Gower! You are here before me. Well, our patient is still sleeping, but he begins to mutter in his sleep. I think his fever is rising. I have left Mrs. Annis, our housekeeper, to sit with him until our return. Seraph, my dear, ring for the coffee. We will have breakfast at once," said Mr. Elfinstar.

His daughter complied with his request, and breakfast was served.

While they were still at table, Jonas Stackpole, the man who had been dispatched on the previous evening to Hobart Town to fetch a physician, returned and entered the breakfast room.

"Well, Stockpole, have you brought the doctor?" inquired his master.

"Yes, your honor, and two constables to the heels of him," replied the man, pulling his red hair by way of a salute.

"Constables!"

"Yes, your honor; 'tis the jail doctor I went for, seeing the hurted man were in the convict's clothes, which they also sent two constables to fetch him in case he should be discovered to be a bolter and found able to be taken back."

"Where have you left the doctor and the officers, Jonas?"

"In the sitting room on the left side of the hall, if you please, sir."

"I will see them immediately. Will you come, Mr. Gower?" inquired the old gentleman, rising.

"Certainly," replied the young man, following his example.

They both left the room and passed into the parlor where Stackpole had left the visitors.

There Mr. Elfinstar found Dr. Boggs, the red-faced and round-bodied surgeon, and two stout constables.

He bowed courteously, and begged them to be seated.

"I thank you, sir; but we would rather see the wounded man at once, not only to examine into his condition, but also to identify him if practicable; for we suspect him to be no other than that escaped convict, Jack Hice, who bolted about six weeks ago, and who has baffled pursuit ever since," said Dr. Boggs.

"Very well, then, my good sir, we will proceed to our patient's bedside," replied Mr. Elfinstar, turning to lead the way.

When the party entered the sick chamber they found the housekeeper still seated by the bedside of the patient, who was moaning in his restless sleep.

"You may retire now, Mrs. Annis. I will ring if you should be wanted," said Mr. Elfinstar, leading the visitors to the bedside.

The housekeeper arose, bent her head and went out of the room.

Dr. Boggs stooped over the sleeping man.

"Yes, it is as I suspected. He is the fugitive convict, Jack Hice."

"How long has he been in the colony, and of what crime has he been convicted?" anxiously inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower, who was still profoundly affected by the perfect resemblance of the so-called Jack Hice, the convict, to his own old companion, Ham Gow, the tramp, that he was still in doubt whether they were not one and the same.

"He has been in the penal settlements here, altogether, about eight years; but since his last conviction, only about a year. It was a burglary in London, committed about eighteen months ago; but he so successfully eluded the police that he was not arrested until three months afterward, when he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to ten years' transportation. He is a very hard case," concluded the doctor, who then turned and began to examine the condition of the wounded man.

Mr. Hamilton Gower now felt convinced that this felon could not be his own tramp, suddenly precipitated down into

the depths of perdition; and he could only wonder at the extraordinary and unaccountable resemblance that rendered the two men, in form, features, complexion, voice, and gesture, exact counterparts of each other, and of himself.

When he had first met Ham Gow, in the mad rush on the way to the new gold fields, he had learned from that vagrant all about the perplexity occasioned in the neighborhood of Hawkeville by what seemed to be the miraculous ubiquity of the one Ham Gow, or his equally miraculous multiplicity into three Ham Gows.

And now Mr. Hamilton Gower understood the mystery.

The tramp was the first and only real Ham Gow—he who had foregathered with the doctor in the neighborhood of Stony Fells on the morning of his flight from Hawkeville.

The earl was the second Ham Gow, and had ridden in the train with the parson on the day of his departure from Hawkewood.

And the felon was the third Ham Gow, who had escaped to France on Abbott's fishing smack on the morning of the homicide at Hawke Hall.

All was clear now; but whence came the extraordinary likeness between three men so far removed in station and so different in character as the earl, the tramp, and the felon?

While Mr. Hamilton Gower turned these questions over in his mind the prison doctor was examining the wounds of the man Hice, who was now awake, feverish, and groaning with pain. The surgeon's touch seemed to agonize him. He winced and writhed.

"I will not hurt you a bit more than I can possibly help, my man, but I must see to your injuries, you know," said Dr. Boggs, kindly.

Hice groaned in response.

The surgeon called for his saddlebags and took from them lint, salve, linen bandages, Castile soap, sponge, and so forth. These he laid out in order on a table by the bedside.

Then he called for warm water, which was brought.

Finally he washed and dressed the wounds of the man, changed his pillow, smoothed his bedclothes, administered a cooling and composing draught, and left him to repose.

"Will you sit by the patient for a few minutes, sir? I wish to speak to Mr. Elfinstar and these officers apart," whispered the doctor to Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Certainly," assented the young man.

The doctor gathered his salves, lints, bandages, and so forth, into his saddlebags again, directed the boy to carry away the basin of water and the towels, and then signaled Mr. Elfinstar and the two constables to accompany him from the room.

When the four men were again in the parlor the doctor said:

"Hice is very dangerously, and, I fear, fatally wounded. The charge entered his left side below the ribs, passed entirely through his body and came out on the right side. It would be next to a miracle if the ball should have passed through the man's body without fatally wounding some vital part. Still, I have read of one such case in which the injuries were not mortal; but no human being, no doctor, however great his skill and experience, could tell for a certainty whether this man is mortally hurt or not. The diagnosis is so far extremely unfavorable; but nothing short of a post-mortem examination could enable anyone to define the exact nature of these internal injuries. A few hours must decide his case for life or death."

"What can be done in the meantime, doctor?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar.

"Nothing can be done to avert death if his injuries be what I think; but much, in any case, may be done to alleviate pain."

"He must not be moved?"

"Of course not. Removal would be certain death to him. I will leave one of these constables on guard—though there is no danger of the prisoner running away at this juncture, I think—and I will take the other and return to Hobart Town to report the case to the commandant. Before I go I will leave carefully written directions for the treatment of the wounded man, and I will see him again in the course of to-morrow."

The hospitable master of the Mountain Hermitage then asked the surgeon whether he and his companions had breakfasted.

The doctor replied that they had left Hobart Town be-

fore the dawn of day, and had therefore, had no opportunity for such refreshment.

"Then please walk into the next room, where I have had breakfast prepared for you," said Mr. Elfinstar, as he led the way to the well-spread table.

While the visitors were breakfasting their horses were resting and feeding.

An hour later they were all on their way back to Hobart Town.

Mr. Elfinstar went back to the bedside of the wounded man, whom he found now in a high fever, and as restless as any sufferer could be whose wounds made every motion painful, and so restrained him from tossing about.

He was still watched by Mr. Hamilton Gower, who had just laid a cold, wet cloth over his forehead.

"How do you feel by this time, my man?" kindly inquired the old gentleman.

"Feel as if I was in —, where I shall be in a few hours, I reckon," growled the convict.

"No; the doctor gives hopes of your recovery, and we mean to do the very best we can to insure it."

"Don't; I don't want to recover. I want to die and be done of it," groaned the man, clinching his hands and straining his head back in pain.

"Few of us are prepared to die. Are you?"

"As well as ever I shall be! Oh-h-h!"

"I hurt you by making you talk. Mr. Gower, my dear sir, I will take your place for the present. Go you and get a little fresh air. You will find my daughter somewhere in the grounds at this hour."

The young man, "nothing loath," arose, and, saying:

"I hope you will summon me, sir, as soon as I can be of any service," bowed and left the room.

He strolled out upon the grounds and soon found Miss Elfinstar, seated in an arbor on the highest terrace. Her garden hat was lying at her feet, and her yellow hair was flowing over her graceful shoulders, glistening in the morning light like a mantle of the golden fleece.

She had been reading, but she laid aside her book on his approach.

"How is the poor soul?" she inquired, as she signed for

him to sit beside her with the simple, childish gesture of patting the bench with her hand.

"He is in great pain," answered the young man, as he took the indicated seat.

"Is he in danger?"

"In great danger, I fear, though no one, not even the surgeon, can at this juncture tell the nature or extent of his danger."

"Where is he hurt? And has the ball been extracted?" she inquired, with a persistency of interest that really distressed her companion, who answered, gravely:

"The wounds are internal. The ball passed through his body, and out at his right side below the waist. The probabilities are that his injuries are fatal."

"Oh!" said the young girl, very softly; and she asked no more questions about the dying convict.

They were both silent for a few moments. The young man was looking out over the magnificent expanse of country commanded by the elevated point of view—the rocky, wooded decline of the mountain from their feet; the deep scoop of the wooded valley that seemed so far below them; the silver line of the Derwent River, that glimmered through the depths of forest trees at the bottom of the vale; the rolling hills beyond; the distant mountains, whose vague summits took all beautiful hues of green, violet, rose, and opal, as they blended with the snowy, gold-tipped clouds on the horizon.

"What a lovely country! What a paradise!" murmured the young man, as he gazed.

"Yes; it is Switzerland, with a tropical sky and tropical vegetation," answered the young lady.

"You have been in Switzerland?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Yes; many times," she answered.

"Pardon my curiosity; it is not idle or impertinent, I assure you; it is inspired by the deep interest that I feel for—for your father and for yourself—but, beautiful as this situation is, I find myself wondering that a gentleman of wealth and position, with a young and lovely daughter, should choose to live out here, in these solitudes, cut off from all refined and civilized society. If the question is **not** an intrusive one——"

He stopped suddenly. He saw that his question was an intrusive one; not only intrusive, but cruel.

Mr. Hamilton Gower, though a true gentleman by birth and education, had really mixed but little with the polite world, and knew but little of its conventionalities—knew not that, as a rule, with but few exceptions, these conventionalities forbade the putting of personal questions.

Now he saw that he had been indiscreet and inhuman.

His young hostess had grown pale as death, even to her lips, which had assumed an ashes-of-roses hue.

He felt that this deathly emotion had been caused by his own words; yet he felt, also, that he must not seem to notice this agitation—that to do so would be to add “insult to injury”; that he must simply drop the subject and turn the conversation.

He did so with tact and delicacy.

“Yes, a hermitage so lovely as this might well attract any man who is fond of study and solitude. The grounds are beautiful, the prospect—magnificent!” he said, letting his eyes wander everywhere but into the face of his companion.

“Shall I—show you—over the place?” she inquired, in a low and hesitating voice.

“If you please,” he answered, picking up her garden hat from the ground and handing it to her with a bow.

She thanked him, arose and, carrying it in her hand, left the arbor and led the way down to the second terrace and around to the back of the house, where groves of fruit trees—figs, oranges, pomegranates, nectarines, and other choice varieties—grew, and where walks and arbors, shaded with grapevines, invited repose.

It would take too much time and space to describe all the charms of these paradisaal gardens and groves.

The young stranger, attended by a lovely young being whose angelic beauty seemed in perfect harmony with her surroundings, passed several hours in wandering down flowery lanes, or among fragrant groves, or by crystal streams or sparkling fountains, resting occasionally on some rustic garden seat under the shade of some wide-spreading forest tree, or in the recess of some cool grotto or rose-covered arbor.

But through all their paradisaal wanderings the young

man observed that his "peri" was as pensive as she who had been banished from Paradise, and whose story had been told by a mortal poet.

Had this "Seraph" been banished from her heaven? What had she left behind? What had she lost? What had she suffered?

He could not tell, and he dared not ask a question, or even hint a question. He had had enough of trying that sort of experiment.

Of one thing he would have given much to be assured—that it was not a lover whom she was lamenting.

The first dinner bell, sounding from the open windows, recalled them to the house.

They parted in the hall, each to go to his or her own room to prepare for dinner.

Mr. Hamilton Gower, who had recovered his saddlebags, was unusually careful with his toilet.

He had become deeply and painfully interested in the young lady of the house, not only for the beauty of her face and form, though that was of the most exquisite order; nor from the rare loveliness of her character, though that was unequaled in his experience of life; nor from the mystery which surrounded her position, though that absorbed and perplexed his mind; but, perhaps, from all these causes combined, and also from a subtle magnetism that she unconsciously exercised over him.

The second dinner bell interrupted his reveries, and called him down into the drawing room, where he found his host and hostess awaiting him.

"Give your arm to Miss Elfinstar, if you please, my young friend," said the old gentleman, waving his hand toward the door that led toward the dining room.

"How have you left our patient?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower, as soon as they were seated at the table.

"His fever increases; he is very much excited; he evidently believes that he is going to die. He has asked to see a minister," answered the host, as he sent a plate of soup down to his guest.

"He! That ruffian—that desperado, who 'fears not God, neither regards man!' He asks for a minister!" exclaimed the young man, in surprise.

"Ah! my young friend," sighed the host,

“‘A deathbed’s a detector of the heart.’
‘Conscience doth makes cowards of us all.’

And I fear that man’s conscience is a moral cesspool. I sent Jonas Stackpole back to Hobart Town two hours ago to fetch the jail chaplain—a good and earnest man, I have heard—and I hope he will arrive here before night.”

“Papa, dear, who is with him now?” inquired Miss Elfinstar.

“Mrs. Annis, my child. I always leave Mrs. Annis with him when neither Mr. Gower nor myself are on guard.”

“Will you let me go and take Mrs. Annis’ place after dinner, papa?”

Mr. Elfinstar hesitated; then answered, doubtfully:

“You make a strange request, Seraph. It would scarcely be wise in me to grant it. The man is a ruffian, my darling.”

“He is a ruffian by birth and training, I suspect, papa. He cannot help being a ruffian, poor soul! And, besides, he is now a ruffian wounded unto death, and cannot hurt anyone,” pleaded the gentle being.

“That may all be true, my dear. And, besides—I ought to tell you, I suppose, though I did not intend to trouble you with the matter, and should not have done so had you not asked to go to the man—but he has begged to see you.”

“There!” exclaimed Miss Elfinstar, triumphantly.

“‘The young lady,’ he said, ‘whom he had frightened, but whom he never intended to injure beyond the taking of her jewelry.’ ”

“You see he is human, after all, papa, dear! You will let me go to him immediatley, will you not?”

“Yes, my child, I will take you to him,” said the old gentleman, rising.

But before they could leave the room the door was opened by Jonas Stackpole, who bobbed his red head and announced:

“Parson is here, your honor.”

“Indeed! You have brought him very quickly. I did not expect you back for some hours yet.”

“Met parson on the Hobbyton road, sir.”

“Ah! that explains it. Where have you left his reverence?”

"In the parlor, sir."

"I will see him at once. My dear Seraph, you must defer your visit to the dying man until after the chaplain has seen him. You understand the necessity of that?"

"Oh, perfectly, my dear father," replied the young lady.

"Will you come?"

"Certainly, if my presence would not be deemed an intrusion," said the young gentleman, as he followed his host from the dining room.

They found the Rev. Mr. Heron, chaplain of convicts, seated in an easy-chair. He was a tall, pale, refined and intellectual-looking man, with dark hair and dark eyes.

"Ah, reverend sir! I am very glad to see you," exclaimed the master of the Mountain Hermitage, approaching his clerical visitor with an outstretched hand. "The Rev. Dr. Heron, I presume?"

"Mr. Heron, at your service, sir," said the chaplain, with a bow.

"Ah, yes! My name is Elfinstar."

The chaplain bowed.

"And this gentleman is Mr. Gower, of whom more by and by."

Messrs. Heron and Gower saluted each other.

"Well, Mr. Heron, I am happy to see that you have arrived much sooner than we could have hoped to see you."

"I was so fortunate as to meet your messenger on the road when I was on my way to see the wounded man now in your house, whom our surgeon recognized as Jack Hice, one of my unhappy flock, and whom he reported to be in a dying condition. I came away at once to see what I could do for him."

"Right, reverend sir; the wretched man has asked for you, and as he is very low, perhaps I had better take you to his bedside at once."

"If you please, Mr. Elfinstar."

"Come, then. Come, also, Mr. Gower."

The three gentlemen proceeded to the sick room.

Mr. Elfinstar sent away the woman who was on watch there, and then conducted the minister to the bedside.

Mr. Heron looked on the prostrated wretch; forgotten was all the sufferer's violent and habitual insolence to himself in the jail; forgotten was everything relating to the

man, but that right there and then lay the suffering and dying sinner, needing his ministrations.

"You wished to see me, Hice?" he said, in a gentle tone, as he bent over the agonized creature.

"I wanted to see your reverence—yes. Oh-h-h! If I were a Roman Catholic I should want to make a confession. As it is, I want to tell a story—— Oh-h-h! Sir, brute, convict, desperado, as I am called, I am the son of a belted earl!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A MYSTERY CLEARED UP

"YES, sir; and, gentlemen, you may stare, but I repeat it—thief, convict, desperado as I am called, I am the son of a belted earl, the son of a peer of England! You will believe me when I tell you my story," said the dying felon, in a faint voice.

"Had we not better retire?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, in a low tone.

"Why?" demanded the felon, almost in a whisper.

"Because you may prefer to tell your story to your minister alone," explained the old gentleman.

"Not a bit of it; but I would like some more brandy," murmured the convict.

Mr. Elfinstar poured out half a glass of brandy, stirred into it a salt spoon full of condensed beef juice, and gave it to the sinking man.

Then the three gentlemen, Messrs. Elfinstar, Gower, and Heron, seated themselves around the bed to hear the convict's story, and to administer, from time to time the strong support that was needed to keep up his failing strength to the end.

"I wish one of you, sirs, would take pen and ink and note down my words as I speak them, for—for—there's a man pursued with warrants for a crime that I committed—the one crime that weighs heaviest on my soul at this hour. That was the reason, gentlemen, I want you all to be present while I tell my story, that it may be duly witnessed."

Mr. Elfinstar left the room to procure writing materials, and soon returned with a small, portable writing desk, which he placed upon a little table by the bedside, before the minister.

"You will find all that you require in there, reverend sir," said the old gentleman, as he resumed his seat.

The chaplain bowed and opened the desk.

The convict began his story.

Perhaps his most interested listener was the gentleman who called himself Mr. Hamilton Gower.

Somewhat strengthened by the strong sustenance that he had just taken, the man spoke in a less faint voice.

"I told you that I was the son of an earl, and I am—the son of the late Right Honorable Roscius Hawke, fifteenth Earl of Hawkewood."

Here one of his hearers started involuntarily and bent eagerly toward the speaker.

"He was not the Earl of Hawkewood then, however. He was only Capt. Hawke, of the ——th Hussars, when he married the gypsy girl who became my mother."

"Married!" repeated the three gentlemen in a breath.

The dying convict glared at them through his blazing, cavernous black eyes, and growled forth:

"Yes, married—I said married! What do you mean by staring at me? Capt. Roscius Hawke, of ——th Hussars, afterward Roscius, fifteenth Earl of Hawkewood, in the Peerage of England, did really marry Radiance Gow, who became my mother."

The look of amazement, dashed with incredulity, on the faces of the three gentlemen was too much for the convict, dying as he was; he burst out into a feeble laugh, and, laughing, said:

"Oh, don't be alarmed! I am not a claimant of the earldom of Hawkewood. I shall not disturb the succession. Could not do so for many reasons, even if I should live. Listen, gentlemen, while I explain:

"It was not the usual infatuation of a poor girl for a fine gentleman who made love to her that caused my mother to become the wife of Capt. Hawke. Why, the captain was over sixty years when he first saw the maiden Radiance, and she was but fourteen, with no more dreams of love or marriage than if she had been but four. So much of a child

was she that he did not court her, but he bought her of the tribe. They would not have sold her to him, you may depend, if she had been a born gypsy. But she was not a gypsy, as the captain perceived at first sight, for she was such a splendid blonde that they had named her Radiance. She had a complexion like roses on snow, hair like sunshine, eyes like stars. Such was my mother.

"So, you see, she was no gypsy, or they never would have let the captain have her at any price; but she was a waif, an adopted child of the tribe, and so they sold her to the captain in consideration of a round sum of money and on condition that he would marry her according to the gypsy laws before taking her from their protection, and afterward by the Christian rites as soon as he should take her to his own home and people.

"And so the beautiful, ignorant child of fourteen was sold and married to the veteran soldier of sixty-odd, according to the gypsy laws, under which she had been brought up and which she held sacred.

"Believing herself to be a wife and 'a lady,' she went away with the 'kind' old gentleman who had won, not her woman's heart, for she was not a woman, but her childish affections by his presents of sugar plums, toys, and finery, and his promises of much grander things.

"He took her down to Brighton, where his regiment was stationed, and procured lodgings for her in a retired part of that gay watering place. But I need not say to men of the world like you, gentlemen, that the last condition in the contract made between the gypsies and the captain was never fulfilled, and that the 'gypsy' maiden was never married by Christian rites.

"She did not importune her owner on this subject. She did not know its importance. She had been married with the same ceremonies that she had always seen observed at the weddings of the gypsy men and women, and she was perfectly satisfied.

"They had lived about a year at Brighton when Capt. Hawke was placed on the retired list with half pay, and he took his gypsy wife and her infant child—myself, gentlemen—to Boulogne-sur-Mer, where everything was, at that time, cheap, and where he could live comfortably on his half pay.

"We lived at Boulogne five years, during which time I had two sisters born who did not stay long in this world, and one brother, who was three years younger than myself.

"When I was something over five, and my brother a little over two years old, an event occurred, or, rather, I should say a series of events followed each other in rapid succession, and left an indelible impression upon my memory.

"The first of these was a catastrophe. My poor, pretty mother was very fond of the sea, and used to take us down on the sands every fine afternoon.

"One fine afternoon, late in October, she took us down to the beach and hired a rowboat to take us out on the water. Now, though I remember the catastrophe perfectly well, I do not remember how it was brought about; but we had not rowed far before the boat was upset.

"I remember perfectly well, as if it had happened yesterday, the sudden lurch, the piercing scream of my mother—she had only time for one—the plunge, the shock, the strangulation, the struggle, the ringing of many bells in my ears, the flashing of many lights into my eyes, until not only my ears and eyes but my whole brain and body seemed to see and to hear—to be filled with melody and illumination—to float in a buoyant atmosphere of light and music until the mental anguish of terror and the physical anguish of strangulation subsided in a sense of delicious repose which sank into unconsciousness."

Here the convict's voice showed such signs of weakness that Mr. Elfinstar prepared and administered another supporting draught.

"I have heard that drowning is a very easy death," said the old gentleman, as he took the empty glass from the lips of the man and placed it on the little stand.

The convict regarded him for a moment with a humorous expression as he replied:

"Don't you believe it, sir. Never you go out of this world by water if you can help it—unless it is to keep from going out by fire! The music, and the illuminations, and the sweet, floating sleep, is well enough; but the prelude of terror and strangulation, the anguish of mind, and the agony of body, is something not as enjoyable as they are cracked up to be."

"I am not speculating on suicide, my friend; but go on with your narrative," replied Mr. Elfinstar.

"Well," resumed the convict, "the next thing I was conscious of was the sense of pins and needles that seemed to be undulating through my nerves instead of blood, and of a body and limbs as cold and heavy as lead. I tried to cry, but it hurt me to breathe, much less to cry out. I saw people standing around me, and realized that I was in bed.

"And, now, master," said the convict, turning on his host the same humorous smile that sat so strangely on his dying face, "there's another bit of advice I would give you out of my own experience. If ever you should happen to go out of the world by water, don't you come back again. Drowning is bad enough, but bringing you to is a deal worse."

"Go on with your narrative, my friend. My time is limited," said the chaplain, in a gentle tone.

"Yes, your reverence. Well, for some time after my painful return to consciousness all was confusion within me and around me. Out of this confusion, however, some distressing circumstances came to my cognizance: The first was that I myself had been the only one of the party who had been saved. My mother, my little brother, and the boatman who rowed us had all been drowned. The body of my mother and that of the boatman had been recovered. The body of my little brother had not yet been found, and, in fact, it never was found. I was saved when I had risen for the third time by a boatman, who seized me by my clothes and dragged me into his boat.

"My mother's remains were interred in the little cemetery of St. Sulpice, just out of the city. I remember the funeral, and how equally my mind was divided between grief for the loss of my mother and admiration of my own black tunic and knickerbockers, and the black crape scarf on my cap.

"Quick upon my poor mother's death and burial came another event, equally startling in another way. One day my father received a letter which excited him very much, and caused him to take a sudden journey to England, leaving me in the care of a girl named Minette, who had been in my mother's service and in her confidence ever since I could remember. She had come with my mother from the

gypsy tribe, having been, like her, an adopted child of the wandering people.

"From Minette I learned all that I have told you of my mother's early history.

"My father returned after a week's absence, and I noticed after he came back no one called him 'captain.' Everyone called him 'my lord.' And Minette told me that he had succeeded to the title and estates of his late uncle, and that he was now the Earl of Hawkewood. I was still too young and ignorant to appreciate this elevation.

"But I did, to my sorrow, appreciate the misfortune when our home was broken up, and I was separated from my father and Minette and placed alone among strangers in a boarding school for small boys, of whom I was the smallest and the youngest.

"In less than one month my child life had been totally changed, and I had been bereft of father, mother, brother, nurse, and home.

"I was, perhaps, the most wretched schoolboy that ever existed. I saw my father but once after he had bid me good-by in the parlor of the school. It was a year later when he came to make me a visit. He paid my bills, and gave me cake, toys, and pocket money.

"That was the last I ever saw of him.

"Minette, my mother's maid, married a deck hand, and went as stewardess on the *Victoria* steamer, plying between the English and the French coast; but whenever the ship was in port at Boulogne she always came on shore and watched for an opportunity of seeing me when I walked out with the school.

"She was a very pretty and winsome young woman, and was known to have been a trusted servant of my father, and so she was allowed to speak to me. She always reminded me that I was the Viscount Hawke, the eldest son and heir of the Earl of Hawkewood.

"Time went on until I was ten years old, and had received the groundwork of a good education. I had not heard of my father for years, but I suppose my quarterly bills were paid for me by somebody, or I should not have been allowed to remain at the school.

"When I was about ten years old I lost Minette, who one day met me when I was out walking with the school, and

told me that was her last trip on the *Victoria*, as she was going to be a stewardess on board the *Albert*, a steamer plying on the Thames between London and Greenwich. And the poor woman gave me a guinea and many kisses and bid me good-by.

"My heart was broken, for Minette was the only creature on earth who loved me, or whom I loved; and so I lost my spirits, my sleep, and my appetite. I brooded and brooded over my lonely life. Other boys had visits and presents from friends and relatives, and they went home for their holidays; but I had no visitors and no vacations. I stayed at the pension from one year's end to another without a change. The loss of Minette's weekly visits was 'the last feather.' So I brooded and brooded.

"Well, gentlemen, not to make my story tedious, I began to think of running away from school. I hoarded up the guinea given me by Minette, and the half crowns allowed me for pocket money each week, and I waited for the summer vacation, which was near at hand, when all the pupils except my homeless self, and all the masters except the head one, would go to their several homes for their holidays, and even I should be allowed some freedom from school discipline and surveillance.

"When the vacation came and the school was emptied of all the pupils except my solitary self, and all the masters except the principal, I counted up my savings and found that I had two guineas.

"A golden opportunity for flight then came. The principal of the school was dangerously ill. His wife was in constant attendance upon him. A steamer was about to sail for England—the *Victoria*, in whose service Minette had spent so many years as stewardess.

"So I picked a little valise that was one of my possessions, dressed myself in my best clothes, watched my opportunity and took my way down to the pier. I bought my half ticket at the office window unquestioned, and stepped on board the boat unquestioned. Too many lads had been returning home from school by those steamers about this time for my presence to be questioned.

"When I got to the other side of the Channel my little valise was overhauled by the custom office; but, as I had

nothing contraband in it, I was allowed to go my way, taking my property with me.

"I took a third-class passage in the 'parliamentary train' for London, where I arrived with just ten shillings in my pocket. Whittington had less, I remembered. I inquired of a friendly looking policeman at the Paddington station, where I got out, where the Greenwich steamers were to be found. He directed me, and I went down to the wharf, and, sure enough, there was the *Albert*.

"I went on board and asked a good-natured deck hand if the stewardess was on board. He said 'yes,' and called her. My heart was throbbing with joy at the prospect of meeting my dear Minette. The stewardess came. She was a stranger! I broke down with disappointment and sorrow, and burst into tears. The man and woman were sorry for me, and when they found out who it was I wanted they told me that Minette Taylor and her husband had been employed on the steamer, she as stewardess, he as deck hand, for a month, and that they had then both emigrated to Australia. They had sailed just a week before my arrival.

"I have had many disappointments in my life, gentlemen, but I think that was the bitterest I ever experienced! Can you put yourselves in my place? A poor, truant child of ten years old adrift in the Babylon of London? I think not.

"The Greenwich steamer was about to leave the wharf and I had to go on shore, and there I stood alone. My first impulse was to follow my only friend to the Antipodes. I began immediately to inquire about ships for Australia. After many rebuffs and much chaffing, I was directed to the East India Docks.

"I went thither, and, upon inquiring, found out that there would not be another ship sail for that bourne until the first of the next month, which was more than three weeks off; and I further found that even a steerage passage for a child of ten years would cost fifteen guineas, and by that time I had not half as many shillings. Besides, I doubted whether they would take a boy so young as myself without the authority and sanction of some parent and guardian.

"I never thought of venturing back to school. My next impulse was to seek after my father. I knew—I had

learned from Minette, who, during the last days of our home life at Boulogne, had picked up all the information she possibly could, in my interests—that my father was the Earl of Hawkewood, and that his post office was Hawkeville, in Cornwall.

“I had but seven shilling in my pocket, but I found my way to the Paddington station, and took a third-class ticket through to Penzance with one shilling left.

“I inquired the road to Hawkeville. I could no longer afford to ride, even third class, so I set out to walk to Hawkeville. The journey took me two days. Sometimes I got a lift in a wagon, or it would have taken me longer. I lived on two pence a day, for I bought nothing but bread and milk, and I slept under trees or hayricks.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

“It was warm August weather when I reached Hawkeville, early one morning, and there I inquired the way to Hawke Hall, and learned that the old earl was just dead and buried, and that the young earl, a boy of five years, was living there under the care of an old parson.

“This was another bitter disappointment, but not so bitter as the first. I set out to walk to Hawke Hall, which I reached in the afternoon. I understood by what had been said of the ‘young earl, a boy of five years old,’ that my father had married again, and that I had a younger brother. How my childish heart yearned toward that younger brother!

“As soon as I reached the Hall I inquired of one of the outdoor servants, who were raking up fallen leaves on the lawn, if I could see his reverence, the parson, who was taking care of my brother.

“The man stared at me, and then pointed silently to the servants' entrance. I went thither and rang the bell, and asked the man who opened the door if I could see his reverence, the parson, who was taking care of my little brother.

“This man stared as much as the other had done, and

then asked me if my brother was in the parish school. Now, I had been brought up so far in France, and, though I was of English parentage, I did not know the rank of a parish school—did not know it was a school for poor children. It might, indeed, have been a select school for the boys of the nobility, for aught I knew to the contrary then. So I said I did not know whether my little brother was in the parish school or not; but I wanted to see the parson, who was taking care of him.

“The man looked utterly puzzled, and went to another man and said:

“‘Here’s a little beggar inquiring after his brother, some other little beggar in the work’us, I reckon. Go and tell his reverence.’

“And the second man went away, and down comes an old gent in a long, black coat and a round, black cap.

“He was very abrupt and peremptory with me. He sharply demanded my business. I took off my cap and bowed very low, and then told him my pitiful little story—and it was a pitiful little story, gentlemen—as simply and as incoherently as a child of my age, frightened at the presence in which he found himself, might be supposed to tell it.

“I told him that I was the eldest son of the earl just dead, and the elder brother of the little boy left behind; that my mother and next brother had been drowned just before my father had come into his title; that I had come down to Hawkewood Hall to see my father, and had just learned that he was dead; that I now wanted to see my brother——

“But here the old man in the black gown interrupted me and ordered me to hold my tongue. Then he beckoned a footman and whispered to him. Then the footman beckoned me and I followed him, thinking I was going to be taken to my brother.

“But I was taken into a small room and told to sit down, which I was glad enough to do, for I was dreadfully tired and hungry. The footman then told me to wait there until he should return. I waited, expecting he would fetch my brother.

“But when he came back he only brought a tray with some bread, cheese, cold beef, and a small mug of beer—all

of which was even more welcome than my brother could have been, as they were all so much more desperately needed. He set these before me, and went out and locked the door after him.

"I was a prisoner, but that circumstance did not disturb me; for I was in my father's house, with a good meal before me to satisfy the cravings of my hunger.

"I ate my fill and drank all the beer, and then grew very sleepy, and nodded in my chair; fell off on to the floor and woke up, but felt so heavy with fatigue, drowsiness and meat and drink that I staggered over to a horse-hair sofa, stretched myself upon it and sank into a deep sleep. I must have slept long enough, for the sun was low when I was rudely awakened by the footman shaking me up.

"He told me the dogcart was ready, and I was to take a ride. This news effectually aroused me. I did not know what a dogcart was, but I fancied it was a pretty cart for boys, dragged by trained dogs, and that I and my little brother were to take a drive in it together.

"So I followed the footman to the yard, where, instead of the pretty cart drawn by dogs that I had imagined, I found a nondescript vehicle something like a gig without a top, and instead of my little brother seated in it, I saw a man in a suit something between a soldier's uniform and a servant's livery.

"Before I had time to ask questions I was hustled into the vehicle, and the man drove off. I asked him where we were going, and he answered: 'You will see,' and discouraged all further attempts at conversation. We drove on for about an hour and drew up before a double oaken and iron-bound gate, where the man alighted and rang a bell.

"The gate was opened by a man in a gray suit, and we drove into a flagged yard and up to a great, gloomy-looking stone building. We drew up at a heavy oak door, where my companion alighted and rang again.

"The door was opened by another man in gray, and then my companion lifted me out of the vehicle and led me into a red brick-paved hall, furnished with deal benches along the walls, and a desk in a corner, at which sat a fat old man, with a white head and a black coat.

"My companion led me up to this man, and presented a

folded paper. The latter opened and read it, mumbling some of the words in a half audible tone—like this:

“Hum—hum—John Gow, aged eleven—hum—hum—no regular home or occupation—hum—hum—vagrancy. Here, Billingsby! Take this boy to the children’s ward.”

“I was led off by the officer to a brick-paved room, on the same floor, where about twenty boys in gray uniforms were engaged in carding wool. Gentlemen! I did not even then suspect—I did not for many days understand that I had been committed to the workhouse as a vagrant by Dr. Paul Laude, who was in the commission of the peace. I was committed under the name under which I had been entered at the French *pensionat*, and which had been found marked upon my linen in my little valise.

“That old parson was a fool. He did not believe my pitiful little story, which was natural enough; but he did not take the least trouble to investigate it, which was criminally wrong. So far, in running away from the school in France, to get myself committed to a workhouse in England, I had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I was put to carding wool, and fed on oatmeal porridge on week days, with catechism and beef soup Sundays, for a change.

“I liked the workhouse even less than the school. I had run away from the school because my childish heart was breaking in loneliness, after Minette went away forever. I had run away to find my friends.

“But once in the workhouse, I watched for a chance to run away from those who seemed to be my enemies. On the very first opportunity I made my escape and tramped to Penzance, begging my way and sleeping, as before, under hayricks or cow sheds.

“Oh, gentlemen, why should I prolong this sad story? From the day I ran away from school I went rapidly from bad to worse, and from that to the very worst. I fell among thieves. Our first need is to eat. I could not get work. I do not wish to enter into details here. Enough to say that when I was about fifteen years old, and slim, from long semi-starvation, I became the tool of a band of burglars. Slim and lithe and sinuous as a serpent, I could creep into openings that no man and few boys of my age could have entered.

“It was I who was sent into a house through a cut-out

pane or panel, to creep about in the dark and unlock doors for the band. We had, in the course of a year of two, several successful hauls, always at places far apart from each other.

"One night we were caught, tried, and convicted. It was a very aggravated case of burglary, in which the master of the house into which we entered was killed in the scuffle. So the sentences were heavy. Two men were executed; three were sent to the penal colonies for life; I, on account of my youth, and this being my first offense—so far as was known to the police—was sent over for seven years.

"Gentlemen, I never knew what perdition meant until I learned it on board of the government transport. The horror of a prison ship is a reproach to Christendom! After a voyage of eight months—for it was a wretched old hulk we sailed in, and an unusual allowance of bad weather attended the transport—we reached Sydney, and our penal servitude commenced.

"I was put on the chain gang to work on the public roads. And—I do not know how it was, but the lifers, who had been judged so much more guilty than myself, soon got transferred to private service and became the assigned servants of sheep farmers and others. I have no doubt that by this time they have got their tickets of leave, or their conditional pardons, and are now flourishing as prosperous tradesmen or farmers, while I, judged less guilty by the English court, remained in the chain gang to the end of my term. I think it was because I could not turn hypocrite and hoodwink the chaplain.

"You see, these penal settlements at the Antipodes of civilization were first formed in a spirit of pure humanity to the criminal classes—to give the most guilty, far from the scene of his crime and his reproach, an opportunity for reform, redemption, and restoration to society; but, like all other good things, their purpose has been perverted. It is not the frank, ignorant, blundering criminal that passes through this purgatory to the paradise of respectability. No, indeed! He falls deeper and deeper into the perdition of the penal settlements until he sinks to the hells of Macquarrie Harbor or Norfolk, because, forsooth, degraded as he is, he cannot become a slave and a hypocrite in his spirit and lick the shoes of his overseers or lie to the chaplain!

It is the guilty, treacherous, time-serving wretch who toadies to the commandant and whines to the chaplain that passes successfully through this earthly purgatory of penal service to the earthly paradise of wealth and respectability! I hope it will not be so in the other world, where all hearts are open to the eyes of the Lord and His angels! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, reverend sir, and understand why Jack Hice, with some little instinct of manliness left in him, preferred to be called a ruffian and a desperado rather than to know himself to be a sneak and a hypocrite!" concluded the convict, with a glance at the chaplain.

The latter gentleman mused for a while, and then replied.

"There may have been hypocrites among my unhappy flock. It was not for me to judge. But I know there have also been true penitents really reformed."

"Give me something, sir, if you please, for my strength is going again," said the convict, turning toward the master of the house.

Mr. Elfinstar filled a wineglass with equal parts of beef juice and brandy, and gave it to the convict, who, when he had drunk it all, sighed with satisfaction and resumed his story:

"The outdoor life, the work in the open air, the wholesome though coarse food, and the regular hours, continued for seven years, developed my health and muscle into—what I was two months ago.

"At the end of my term of transportation I worked for a while in the colony and then returned to England. I had left it a slim, pale boy; I returned to it a bronzed, muscular man, improved in physical health and strength, but by no means in moral sense or culture.

"I naturally fell into my old courses, and within a few months I was concerned in another burglary. It was a bank robbery on this occasion. I escaped with a part of the booty, but my pals were all taken. One of them turned queen's evidence and gave away his mates, me among the number. A warrant was made out against me, and London having become too hot to hold me, I left the city and turned my face to Cornwall.

"A mad desire had seized me to find out what had become of my little brother. I had by this time learned enough of

life and law to know that my poor mother's gypsy marriage, though it might and did vindicate her from reproach, did not entitle me to the succession of my father's title and estates.

"I went down to Cornwall all the same, however, to find out what had become of that youngest half brother, who, having inherited my father's earldom, was so much more fortunate than myself, but whose face I had never seen.

"Fourteen years had elapsed since my last visit to Hawke-wood. I was then a lad of eleven, and my brother a child of five years. I was now a man of twenty-five, and my brother, if still living, a youth of nineteen.

"It seemed as if I was always destined to arrive at Hawke-wood at an eventful period. On the last occasion it was immediately after a funeral. On this occasion it was just before a birthday festival that I reached Hawke Hall. My fortunate brother was preparing to celebrate the nineteenth anniversary of his birth.

"The people—villagers, tenantry, and agricultural laborers—were all pouring toward the ornamented grounds of Hawke-wood, where the fête for the 'lower orders' was to be held.

"I did not join them then. It was not prudent to show myself in a crowd by daylight! Some one might recognize me and give me up to justice. But at night I went to see the fireworks. There was a grand ball for the gentry in the house.

"And now, reverend sir, I come to the one act of my life that really does trouble—my conscious, I was going to say, if I were not sick to death of hearing that word so often on the lips of hypocrites and time-servers. Enough. It was the crime of Cain, and it has cursed my soul beyond redemption!" said the convict, as a look of mental anguish for a moment displaced the smile of mockery which was too often on his face.

The chaplain gazed at him with eyes of tender compassion, as he murmured, gently:

"Do not say that your soul is lost beyond redemption, my brother. The mercy of the Lord is infinite."

The convict's mocking smile again displaced the look of anguish as he replied:

"If the infinite mercy of an all-powerful God should

restore the dead to life and wipe off the guilt of fratricide from my soul, I should believe on it and bow down and worship it. But I had better go on and tell you how I came to commit the great crime that I never, certainly intended to commit.

"Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" might have been as incredulously asked by the poor ex-convict, had this deed been predicted to him, as it was by the great man of Israel.

"But I promised to tell you how it happened. It was in this manner: 'Opportunity,' they say, 'makes the thief.' Fate made the fractricide. While the fireworks were at their height and the crowd was cheering outside and the ladies and gentlemen were looking on from the balconies and verandas of the Hall, and people were passing in and out of the house, it occurred to my mind how easy it would be for me, a skilled burglar, to enter that house unobserved, conceal myself in some of the rooms, and as soon as all should become quiet, go through the premises and appropriate some small portion of that wealth nearly all of which should have been mine had justice, instead of law, ruled the case.

"I entered the house unobserved, and I concealed myself effectually in the dark closet of one of the upper bedrooms. There were many dress coats and overcoats hanging up in this place. I took the key from the outside of the door and locked myself in the closet. There was a small window, or ventilator, high up the wall at one end that gave me plenty of air.

"I waited there long and patiently for the household to retire. I had been trained in patience by my life in the penal settlements. At last I fell asleep and slept until I was awakened by hearing voices in the next room—which appeared to be a dressing room, adjoining the bedroom in whose closet I lay hidden. I saw through the keyhole a gleam of red light that pierced like a dagger of fire into the solid darkness of the hiding place.

"I listened to the voices, but could distinguish no words. They spoke in rather a low tone and occasionally indulged in low laughter. I understood by the whole tone of that conversation, not one word of which I could distinctly hear, that some lark was afoot among the speakers.

"I waited and listened for what seemed to me a very long time, and at last I heard some of them dismissed and then all was silent, but for the little muffled sounds made by the occupant of the chamber on retiring to rest. Then the dagger of fire was withdrawn from the keyhole and only a faint light remained as of a taper burning in the room.

"Still I waited until I thought that all the tired household must of necessity be buried in profound sleep, and then I cautiously unlocked my closet door and peeped out. All was quiet.

"Then I silently stepped out from my hiding place into the room. It looked to my sight as if some one had been through the place before me! The bureau drawers had all been pulled open and ransacked, and boxes and dressing cases also stood open with their contents in disorder.

"I heard the regular breathing of the occupant of the room, and knew he was asleep, but I could not see him, for the rich crimson satin curtains, fringed with gold, were drawn closely around his bed.

"I began to search the drawers and boxes to see if my predecessor had left anything worth taking, while I really wondered at the skill and dispatch of a brother professional who could have made such a clean sweep of everything in the short time that had elapsed between the falling asleep of the occupant of the room and the entrance of myself upon the scene.

"But everything had not gone. I found a thick pocket-book containing many bank notes of high denominations. I put that into my bosom without stopping to count the money. I also found some valuable articles of jewelry. I also found a case of pistols, when——

"'Who is that?' came from the curtained bed.

"I snatched up a pistol and turned upon the speaker. The bed curtains had been drawn aside and a young man was sitting up in bed looking anxiously out into the half-dark room. I seized a pistol, sprang forward and dealt him a heavy blow on the top of his head, meaning to stun him, not to kill him. He fell like a log, and I turned to resume my investigations. I found but little more that I could take away with me.

"As I was about to leave the room, however, I saw on the floor a coarse red woolen scarf that was certainly no part

of a gentleman's, or even a gentleman's servant's, wardrobe. 'This has been dropped by my illustrious predecessor,' I said, and picked it up and wound it about my throat, and with my booty left the room, closing the door after me.

"When I found my way out of the house, which I did without difficulty, for I was skilled in such performances, day was dawning.

"I walked rapidly to the coast, being determined to get away to France in some fishing smack if possible.

"I was lucky. I found a fisherman getting ready to sail for the deep sea fishing. I told him I would give him ten pounds to take me across the Channel. The job would take him but a few days, and would pay him more than a month's fishing.

"But the rogue was sharp, and declined my first offer. I doubled my bid, and he accepted. All this time he addressed me as Ham Gow. I had learned in the course of my checkered career the wisdom of holding my tongue. I let him Ham Gow me uncontradicted to the end of the voyage. One day he picked up the old red woolen scarf that I had brought away.

"'Ay,' he said, 'this will be Young Nan's work. I saw her when she was a knitting of it, and here be the two letters that stand for your name, H. and G., knitted into the work. She is a skillful woman with the needle, is that mother o' yourn.' I said: 'Yes, she is.' And when the fishermen landed me at St. Rosalie on the coast of France, I purposely left the scarf in the little cuddy hole he called the cabin of his boat. I paid him the stipulated twenty pounds. He told me that he thought it was a fine thing to have made a fortune in the gold fields of Australia as I had done and to be able to throw around money as I was doing.

"I did not intend to remain at St. Rosalie. That same day I walked to Dieppe and took steerage in a steamer bound for England. And the first thing that met me in landing on my native shore was the placard, everywhere pasted up, offering a reward for the apprehension of Ham Gow and Henri Delaplaine, charged with the murder of Horace, Earl of Hawkewood, on the morning of September the 2d, 18—.

"This was the first intelligence I received that I had

killed a man, whom I only had intended to stun, and that the man was my own brother. I was a fratricide. The curse of Cain was upon me!"

CHAPTER XXIX

WHILE LIFE, HOPE

THE wretched man, overwhelmed by the memory of his fratricidal murder, unintentional though it had been, covered his haggard face with his horny hands and relapsed into silence that continued for a few moments.

Then, with a deep sigh that seemed to rend his bosom, he continued:

"Yes, I felt that the curse of Cain was upon me. I had killed the young brother whom I had never seen, but whom in my heart I had loved and longed to look upon, from the first hour that I had heard of his existence. I fell into a state of despair, of desperation!

"I hardly cared now what became of me. I wandered listlessly toward London, spending a shilling now and then for a meal or a lodging. In the course of my tramp I came upon a gypsy encampment. They were of the great Gow tribe to which my mother had been affiliated.

"I inquired if there were any among them who remembered Radiance Gow, the adopted child of their queen. I found there were many; for if my mother had been living she would have been but thirty-nine years old. I told them that I was her son; and in the solitude of my state and the soreness of my heart I told them my whole story.

"They received me very kindly among them; said that they would both shelter and defend me; that no one should take me out of their hands.

"That was a vain boast, gentlemen! I had not been two days in the gypsy camp before I was arrested by a party of excursionists. The gypsies resisted; but a *posse comitatus* was quickly raised, and I was carried off in triumph. I was arrested, not for myself, however, or for my share in the robbing of the bank, though there was a warrant out against me on that charge. No! but I was taken again for Ham

Gow, the accused murderer of the Earl of Hawkewood—this Ham Gow, who bore my own surname and my exact image! And when I saw the poster with the description of the man who was charged with the earl's murder, and for whom the reward was offered, I no longer wondered that I had been taken for him.

"I was lodged in the nearest police station house that night and taken before a magistrate the next morning. But lo and behold! there were police officers and detectives who at once boldly denied that I was Ham Gow, however much I resembled the Hawkeville tramp, or that I was, or could ever have been, anybody else but myself, Jack Hice, the returned convict and burglar, who was badly wanted for his share in the robbery of the Coal and Oil Bank.

"So I was carried off to London instead of to Hawkeville, and thrown into Newgate to await my trial. I was soon arraigned at the Old Bailey, tried, convicted, and—as I was an old offender—I was sentenced as heavily as the limits of the law would allow. I am here for fourteen years. I have served out something more than a year of this sentence. I broke my chains, hoping to make good my escape. I have failed and I have been recaptured. I have told my story for two reasons: first, to deliver my bosom of its hideous secret; and secondly, to vindicate an innocent man—my double—Ham Gow, who might otherwise suffer for my crime. I do not expect to be saved, I do not hope for the pardon of the Lord. I look to pass through much suffering in the next stage of existence, before my soul can be redeemed, if it can ever be redeemed. I have done."

The convict ceased to speak and turned his face to the wall.

"I thought you said you were not a Roman Catholic," said the chaplain.

"I am not. I am nothing," replied the man.

"But you alluded to—purgatory."

"That was all out of my own head."

"My poor friend, let me pray with you," pleaded the chaplain.

"No, not now. It is no use. I am not fit. If I had not killed my brother, I might pray; but as I have, I dare not. There!"

"Oh, my poor friend, do not say that! To despair of the Lord's mercy is the most fatal of sins," said the chaplain.

"I don't despair of the Lord's mercy; I despair of myself. Parson! you never killed your own brother! What do you know about it?"

"Let me pray with you, Hice."

"I can't, I tell you!"

"Oh, do not say you can't pray!" pleaded the chaplain.

"I won't, then! Will that suit you better?" surlily demanded the convict.

"Ah! what can we do with this poor soul?" inquired the chaplain, in a low voice and with a deep sigh.

Old Mr. Elfinstar sorrowfully shook his head.

But here the stranger guest, Mr. Hamilton Gower, who had been a silent but deeply interested spectator and listener, suddenly surprised the whole party by saying:

"Gentlemen, if you will leave me alone with this man for a few minutes, I think I can bring him to a better state of mind."

The host and the chaplain looked at the speaker in silent wonder and incredulity.

"Will you permit me to make the trial?" he inquired, with a grave smile.

"Yes—let us do so," said Mr. Elfinstar, lightly touching the chaplain on the shoulder, and rising to lead the way from the room.

Mr. Heron arose and followed his host out, closing the door behind him.

Hamilton Gower found himself alone with Hice.

This young stranger had been the most deeply interested of the whole party in the singular story told by the convict. He had listened to it in amazement, humiliation, and a desperate effort at incredulity; for there is something in the truth that will force itself upon the convictions of even the most reluctant of truthful hearers.

Thus Hamilton Gower—as he chose to call himself—was compelled against his will, and with the deepest mortification and distress, to believe the dying convict's story.

Now finding himself alone with this miserable felon, whose face was still turned sulkily to the wall, he bent over him and gently inquired:

"Is it the death of your brother that weighs heaviest on your conscience?"

The convict half turned his head and favored the speaker with a glance of pity and contempt from the corner of his glittering black eye, before he replied:

"If you were not a born idiot you would not ask such a foolish question! But, after all, how should you know? Nobody can ever know the weight of a sin but he who feels it lying on his heart! And you never killed your brother!"

"How should you know what I have done, if you do not know my past life? If I have not killed my brother I have come as near as possible to doing so," said the young stranger, in a voice of deep sorrow.

"What is that you say?" inquired the convict, becoming interested at last.

"I say that I must have killed my brother! But listen: As sure as there is a Heaven above us, you never killed yours!" said the young man, solemnly.

"There! I thought you were an idiot, and now I know it! Give me some more of that brandy and stuff, or I shall give up the ghost in ten minutes. Don't you know it is nothing but that brandy and stuff that keeps me out of fire and brimstone?" demanded the convict.

The young gentleman filled a wineglass with equal parts of "brandy" and "stuff," as he had seen his host prepare it from the two bottles on the stand, and gave it to the sinking man, who swallowed the mixture with some difficulty, and then demanded:

"What did you mean by calling Heaven to witness that I hadn't made an end of my brother?"

"I meant that you had not killed your brother, because your brother is not dead," gravely replied Hamilton Gower, as he put the empty glass on the stand.

"You don't know what you are talking about. The young Earl of Hawkewood was my brother. He was found dead in his bed. It was my hand that dealt the blow," said the convict, in a tone of dogged despair.

"You are mistaken," said the young gentleman, calmly.

"You are mad!" replied the convict, contemptuously.

"The young Earl of Hawkewood is alive and well," said Mr. Gower.

"I know the present one, who succeeded the murdered man, is."

"Lewis Manton is not the earl, because Horace Hawke, Earl of Hawkewood, still lives," quietly persisted the young gentleman.

"Oh! I dare say, Charles the First, King of England, still reigns," sneered the convict.

"You mock me; but my words are true, and I will prove them true for your comfort; and now I tell you that you not only never killed the Earl of Hawkewood, but that nobody else ever killed him. You never even struck him. You never had a chance to strike him. He was far away from Hawkewood on the morning after his birthnight ball," said the young gentleman, quietly.

The convict regarded the speaker with a look of real commiseration.

"Poor natural!" he murmured, under his breath. Then: "Look here, mate," he said. "Do your friends allow you to go at large without a keeper? It is very wrong if they do. You're far gone—far gone! I wonder if I could beat any sense in your head on this subject? I'll try. Listen, now: Don't you know that when the Earl of Hawkewood was found murdered in his bed there was a post-mortem examination of the body, and a coroner's inquest, and a verdict of willful murder (against the wrong parties, of course), and that the whole country rang with the news of the young Earl of Hawkewood's murder?"

"Oh, yes; I know all that!"

"How, then, do you say the earl is still alive and well?"

"Because it is true."

"How can it be true?"

"Listen: A body closely resembling that of the Earl of Hawkewood was found in his bed, in a state of apparent death. It was superficially examined by a physician, but no dissection was attempted, because the wound said to have caused death was on the top of the head. It was sat upon by a coroner's jury composed of country bumpkins as stupid as their own oxen, and a set of false conclusions were drawn from false premises from beginning to end."

"What are you driving at, anyhow?" demanded Hice, or Gow, in an irritable tone.

"Attend to me and you will see. I think that you can

appreciate the truth when you hear it. Your own strange story which you tell, yet cannot prove, bears an impress of truth upon it which has convinced me. The story that I am about to tell you will, I hope, bear such an impress of truth as to convince you."

"Go ahead," said the convict, in a faint voice, "and I will rest while I am listening to you."

"You saw the Rev. Dr. Paul Laude when you first visited Hawke Hall, and you must have been overawed by the severe sternness of the man."

"Um-m-e," assented the convict, with a groan.

"Think, then, what must have been the condition of a boy, without father or mother, sister, brother, or companion, left to the sole guardianship and tutelage of such an austere martinet—to be under the control of his eye, or his presence, day and night, sleeping or walking, eating or drinking, studying or idling, without any intermission for years and years?"

"Um-m-e! Poor brother!"

"This treatment made almost a melancholy maniac of the boy; would have quite done so but that he found in the parish school—which he visited in company with his austere tutor—a lad two or three years older than himself, to whom he felt so powerfully attracted that he began to use his study-stultified wits to devise ways and means of making this lad's acquaintance, and he succeeded. The name of this parish schoolboy was Ham Gow."

"Ah!" exclaimed the wounded man, with a sudden access of interest.

"He was the reputed grandson of an old woman named Nan Crook, who lived in the ground room of an old ruined watch tower, at Demondike, near the coast, but on the young earl's estate, and who made her living by fortune telling, quack doctoring, and other irregular, if not illegal, methods."

"Um-m-e," commented the wounded man.

"The young earl used to steal out from the Hall to meet and play with his only companion, while his tutor was taking his afternoon nap, which always happened about the hour that the parish school was dismissed. This lad, Ham Gow, bore so remarkable a resemblance to the boy earl that they must have been perfect counterparts but for the tem-

porary and passing difference in height and in dress. Ham Gow was taller and more plainly clothed than Horace Hawke. But so striking was the likeness that the impudent gossips of the neighborhood did not hesitate to hint that they were half brothers."

"Oh-h-h!" murmured the convict.

"I must not dwell too long upon this subject. Enough to say that all the enjoyment that fell to the little lord's life came out of his companionship with poor Ham Gow, until he envied the lot of the young peasant."

"Shouldn't wonder," came in muffled tones from the black head half buried in the pillows.

"A warm attachment was formed between the boys, which continued for years, when it was discovered by the severe tutor, who threatened the young peasant with the house of correction and hurried the young earl off to Eton, where, instead of leaving him to rough it and be happy with the other noble young rowdies, he remained and mounted guard over the pupil's manners and morals."

"Say!" growled the convict, "can't you get along a little faster? I want to know about that murder, or no murder."

"You are right, I will. Well, as it had been at Hawke Hall, so it was at Eton, and as at Eton, so afterward at Oxford. The young man had no more freedom than the child had; indeed, he had less; not a day, not an hour had he any relief from the galling surveillance and constant criticism that grew more oppressive and intolerable as the years went on, until his health and spirits, his body and mind broke down under the ordeal. And now we come to the night of the so-called homicide at Hawke Hall."

"Yes, tell me about that," said Gow, alias Hice.

"The young Lord Hawkewood had returned from Oxford to Hawke Hall, to spend the midsummer vacation—dragged as usual by his austere tutor. But here his emaciated form, his pale and hollow cheeks, and his lack-luster eyes, languid walk and his lethargic manner shocked the household at the Hall, and engaged the anxious attention of the family physician, who had attended Horace Hawke from his childhood. This Dr. Ellis investigated the cause of general failure of health, and when he found it, remonstrated strongly with the tutor, and insisted on a total

change of habits as absolutely necessary for the restoration of the young earl's health."

"To have swopped places with his brother out here in the penal settlements and taken a turn at breaking stones on the highway with the chain gang," chuckled the convict, in a low and feeble laugh.

"Yes, that might have accomplished the object," said the young gentleman, in an equable tone.

"Well, go on. I thought you said you had got down to the night of the murder," mumbled the man.

"So I have! Well, the sapient tutor, alarmed at last for his pupil's state, determined to seize the opportunity afforded by the nineteenth anniversary of the young lord's birthday to give a grand fête in the grounds to all the villagers, tenantry and laborers on the estate, and a ball in the evening to all the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood—as if the gayety of one day and night could cure the evils caused by long years of an unnatural asceticism and an apathetic existence."

"As if!" assented the wounded man.

"The young earl cared then for none of these things, and on the day of the fête, when the grounds were filled with people in their holiday clothes and highest spirits, the young earl walked among them like a forlorn ghost, until—oh! joyful sight—he came suddenly upon the free and gay companion of his boyhood, Ham Gow, who had just returned from a vagabond tour around the world, and last of all from the gold fields of Australia! The very atmosphere of the tramp was to the earl as the breath of life!"

"Ah-h!" breathed the convict, with full appreciation of this statement.

"The two young men were more alike in personal appearance than ever, except, of course, in toilet. They were now of the same height and size, as well as of the same features and complexion. If the young earl was emaciated from melancholy, the tramp was gaunt from continuous walking. The earl envied the tramp his free and joyous life, more than he had ever done before."

"Should think so," muttered the convict.

"He could not then give more than a few moments to his old playmate, for he was making a sort of 'duty' tour among his tenantry and laborers who were scattered over the

grounds, but he made an appointment with the tramp to come to his chamber that night after the guests should have left the Hall and all the household should have retired. He also arranged that his valet, Henri Delaplaine, should be on the watch to admit Ham Gow and conduct him to his room."

"Ah! here it comes!" murmured the convict.

"At the appointed time the earl entered his bedchamber and was soon followed by the valet, introducing the tramp. And now was carried into effect a little comedy that had been buzzing through the young earl's brain ever since his sudden meeting with the 'gay and happy' tramp."

"That was what I heard going on while I was hidden in the closet. I knew from the tone of the voice and laughter that some lark was afoot, though I couldn't hear a word to tell me what it was," said Hice.

"The little comedy, which came very near turning into a tragedy, was simply this: that the young earl and the young vagrant, who, except in their toilets, were such counterparts of each other, should change characters for a time. Ham Gow, with the assistance of the valet, Delaplaine, was washed, shaved clean, with the exception of a mustache like the earl's that was to be left upon his upper lip, had his hair trimmed exactly like the earl's, his hands and his face whitened, was put into a suit of the earl's fine underclothes, and got to bed, to personate the earl; while young Lord Hawke-wood had his pale face stained with a light decoction of red oak bark to give it the tanned hue of the tramp's complexion, put on a black wig and false black beard supplied from a masquerading costume of the good Mr. Delaplaine, got into the tramp's clothes, and, with all the money and jewels he had at hand and a few changes of clothes in a valise, walked out of the Hall, attended by Delaplaine, to begin to lead a tramp's free and joyous life. Now, do you begin to see light?"

"Oh, yes, it was Ham Gow I killed, and not my brother, thank Heaven!" breathed the convict.

"You killed no one, thank Heaven! Your hands and your conscience are free from blood guiltiness, so far as that night's doings were concerned. And you did not intend to kill your brother, or anyone, you said."

"No, I did not think of my brother at all. And I only meant to stun the man to keep him from giving the alarm."

"And you did only stun the man by that blow you dealt him on the top of his head; but you stunned him so effectually that he remained perfectly unconscious for hours and was apparently dead when discovered in the morning. The village doctor pronounced him dead and certified that death was caused by that wound upon the top of his head; an autopsy was not deemed necessary."

"That would ha' finished him," put in the convict.

"Most certainly. But as the doctor did not finish the work begun by you, it remains unfinished to this day. The tramp—got up to personate the earl, and being more perfectly like the earl, since loss of blood had given a real palor and refinement to his complexion, while his immobility and unconsciousness prevented him from betraying himself by word or manner—partially recovered consciousness while lying on the table in the justice room, where the inquest was held upon his body, received a confused idea of what was going on, and relapsed into insensibility again. When once more he came to himself, he found the room in which he lay locked up and deserted——"

"Say!" interrupted the convict, "how did you find out all this?"

"From Gow himself; but let me go on. When the tramp found himself alone under such unpleasant circumstances, his first mental movement was an effort to remember and understand how he came there. He was enabled to recall the events of the preceding night and the part of the earl that he had undertaken to play, and which he had not played for two hours before he was knocked on the head by a blow that deprived him of consciousness. These recollections enabled him to comprehend his situation. He knew that he had been laid out as dead and that a coroner's inquest had sat upon his 'body.' He now feared that if he should relapse into insensibility again they might bury him! And so he resolved that he would try to get up and run away."

"And small blame to him," muttered the convict.

"He rolled over and let himself drop on the floor. The shock of the fall set his half stagnant blood into circulation. By the dim light in the room he saw some decanters

on a side table. He crawled to the place, struggled upon his knees, and got a bottle of brandy and took a drink."

"Ah!" said the wounded man, with a sympathetic gusto, "that set him up."

"Yes, it did, and this reminds me that you need setting up. You must take a little more of the beef juice and brandy," said Mr. Hamilton Gower, preparing the mixture, which he duly administered.

"And so," continued the narrator, "feeling strengthened by the stimulant, the tramp struggled to his feet and tottered to one of the windows that opened down to the floor and out upon the lawn, unfastened the shutters and walked forth into the grounds, all in his underclothes, just as he had been lifted out of bed. It was a cool but not a cold morning, that second day of September, and the tramp was so much further revived by the freshness of the air that he walked on through that early dawn, stopping to rest whenever he required to do so, until at length he reached the Ruined Tower where his grandmother lived."

"Good for him!" said the wounded man.

"But there he gave out and fell like a log at the feet of the old woman. They had scarcely recognized him under his disguise before a man came in and told them that Ham Gow was charged with the murder of the Earl of Hawke-wood, and that they had better lose no time in hiding him, as the Ruined Tower would be one of the first places to be searched by the police."

"Who are sure to be harkened on to a wrong scent by your coroners' juries, and then blamed for not finding," put in Hice.

"Well, the two women took Ham to a secret hiding place, forever inaccessible to search, and there they nursed him through the severe illness that succeeded to his cracked skull. Meanwhile a great row was raised all through the country about the theft of the young earl's body, and fabulous sums were offered for its recovery. Its disappearance, I hear, has subsided into the chronic mystery of that neighborhood."

A low laugh from Hice interrupted the narrator for a moment.

"Meanwhile Ham Gow recovered, so changed by the loss of his blood and the loss of his hair and beard from what

he had been, and so opposite in appearance to the printed description of his person in the placards that offered a reward for his apprehension, that he walked all the way from Hawkeville to London unrecognized, except by one man, the village doctor, who had years before that attended him through a spell of illness, during which, as a beardless boy with short hair and a pale face, he had looked as he looked on the first morning of his flight, and so the doctor had been enabled to recognize him."

"These doctors are the dickens," said Hice, sententiously.

"Ham Gow got away from this one, however, and he was only once more in peril. It was when he heard that another man, who closely resembled the printed description of himself, had been arrested in his place, and was really likely to suffer in his stead. Then, indeed, he was prompted to give himself up and run the risk of hanging for a man who was alive and well, but whom he could not prove to be so, because he was ignorant of his whereabouts, or that of the valet, Delaplaine, who was the only other person in their confidence. But just as the poor tramp had made up his mind to sacrifice himself, he learned that the man arrested as Ham Gow had been identified as Jack Hice, the returned convict."

"That was myself, you know," said the wounded man.

"Of course. So Ham Gow made good his escape to Australia. He is now in the gold fields of Victoria, where I parted with him more than a year ago, and from where I got news of him scarcely a month since."

"Yes; but that eccentric young Earl of Hawkewood, where is he?" inquired Hice, fixing his deep and burning black eyes upon the narrator.

"He—that admirable young gentleman!—is also out here in these colonies."

"How do you know?"

"Because I came out on the same ship with him, and traveled all over Australia with him. I was traveling in his company when I met Ham Gow in the gold fields."

"Ah!" said the convict, thoughtfully considering the case.

"Perhaps you are Mr. Delaplaine, his lordship's valet."

"No, not quite that; but I am a very intimate friend of the excellent young nobleman."

"He is a good fellow, is he?" inquired Hice.

"Oh, admirable!" replied Mr. Hamilton Gower, with a smile.

"Well, then, if you are not his lordship's valet, who are you?" inquired Hice, with a suspicious glance.

"I have told you. I am the most intimate friend of that incomparable young man."

"But your name?"

"Hamilton Gower, at your service!"

"That sounds like an elongation of Ham Gow; or rather, Ham Gow sounds like an abbreviation of Hamilton Gower. It is deuced queer, taken all together."

"Suppose you do not trouble your head about it. Suppose you try to compose yourself to sleep. It strikes me that you have talked entirely too much already for a man in your condition."

"Oh! Mr. Hamilton Gower—since that is your name—you have given me new life in the assurance that I am not a fratricide, as the Lord knows I never intended to be. Your words have done my body more good than all the brandy and stuff, and my soul more good than all the parson's preaching!" said the man.

"I am glad to hear it. You do not feel now as if you were going to die?"

"No, no!"

"And you will listen to the chaplain, and let him pray with you when he comes?"

"Yes, yes."

"Just now you must go to sleep, all the same. I shall leave you, and send Mrs. Annis to sit by you. Her presence will not disturb you," said the young gentleman.

And he arose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXX

MERCY

HE had told the wretched convict enough to ease the guilty conscience by relieving it of the supposed crime of fratricide; but he had not given the man his full confidence. He reserved that for the present. If Hice were to recover, he would never tell him more than he had already told; but if Hice were going to die, he would confide a certain secret to him.

With these thoughts he joined his host and the chaplain in the sitting room, where he said:

"If you are to spend the day, I think Hice will see you and listen to your counsels in a better spirit than he has hitherto shown, Mr. Heron."

"He is to dine and spend the night with us," put in Mr. Elfinstar.

"I am happy to hear of the man's improved mind, and curious to know by what means you brought it about. I will go to him now," said the chaplain, rising.

"No, not now, I think, sir. Hice has been more excited and fatigued than is good for any man in his condition. I left him trying to sleep," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Very well, then; when he wakes up and has taken some refreshment I will attend him," replied Mr. Heron.

The early dinner was soon announced, and the three gentlemen adjourned to the dining room, where they were joined by Seraph, to whom Mr. Elfinstar introduced Mr. Heron.

The young lady received the chaplain with graceful courtesy, and then went on to inquire after the condition of the wounded man.

"I think his symptoms much more favorable, Miss Elfinstar," replied the young gentleman.

"But are you a competent judge of the case? Have you any medical or surgical knowledge or experience, young sir?" inquired the chaplain, with the "privilege of the clergy."

Mr. Hamilton Gower smiled and said:

"Fifteen months of roughing it in the colonies has brought me to some acquaintance with wounds and wounded men. If this man had been shot through any vital organ his fate would have been decided before this. The bullet passed through the middle of his body, and, as sometimes happens, without piercing a vital organ. I may venture to say more—the man will recover. His previous life in the open air and his semi-starvation, together, have so purified and thinned his blood as to prevent internal inflammation. You will see to-morrow when the surgeon comes that he will confirm my opinion."

"Thank Heaven!" fervently breathed Seraph.

"Amen!" reverently responded Hamilton Gower.

They were by this time seated around the table and the soup was served.

"I hope the surgeon will give him a long time to recover, before he is taken back to the chain gang," said Seraph, with a shudder.

"The man impresses me more favorably since I heard his confession. I shall use influence with the commandant to get him assigned to private service, either in the town or on some sheep farm—that is, should he recover," said the chaplain.

"Oh, I hope and trust you will, Mr. Heron," said Seraph, fervently.

The chaplain looked at the girl with much interest. In the many years that he had held his office as chaplain to convicts, he had never seen anyone show such a depth of tender compassion for those wretched outcasts as this fragile girl felt for the ruffian who had received his wound, if he had not met his death, while making a brutal assault upon herself. This heavenly pity, that moved the admiration of the chaplain, won the love of Hamilton Gower.

After dinner the party separated. The chaplain went into the room of the wounded man, whom he found awake and partaking of a bowl of milk porridge that had been brought him by Mrs. Annis.

The chaplain sat down quietly, told Hice that he was glad to see him so much better, and then waited until the man had finished his repast, and the housekeeper had taken the empty bowl and left the room.

Then the chaplain closed the door and locked it, and seated himself beside the bed.

In the meantime, outside of that sick chamber, old Mr. Elfinstar had retired to the sitting room and had dropped into his easy-chair, exactly where we first found him, and had fallen into his after-dinner doze.

The two young people, left to themselves, strolled out into the beautiful grounds, where they remained until summoned to the house by the tea bell.

Around the pleasant tea table the little party of four assembled again.

Upon Seraph's inquiry into the state of the wounded man, the chaplain said, with a smile:

"I may report of Hice's spiritual condition, as my friend

here reported of his material one—the symptoms are more favorable than they were.”

“Thank Heaven!” again responded Seraph.

After tea, the four persons, whom we may now call the four friends, met in the parlor and spent the evening in playing a quiet game of whist, which old Mr. Elfinstar greatly enjoyed, declaring that for want of partners he had not had a game since he left the old country.

They kept early hours at the Mountain Hermitage, and after family prayers at ten they separated and retired to rest.

Soon after breakfast the next morning the surgeon reached the Hermitage, and went immediately to his patient, whom he found so much better that he made these remarks to his host:

“When a bullet passes quite through the middle of a man’s body from front to back the chances are about a thousand to one that he is mortally wounded. This man has been favored by the thousandth chance, and he will recover.”

This report gave great satisfaction to everyone in the house.

But the chaplain drew the surgeon apart for a little private conversation, and said to him:

“In the name of humanity, I implore you to give this man as long a time for convalescence as you possibly can consistently with your duty.”

“I would gladly do this, Mr. Heron, but you know Hice is one of the most desperate criminals in the settlement,” replied the surgeon.

“You have used the right word—‘desperate.’ ‘His hand against every man’ because ‘every man’s hand is against him.’ I have a better opinion of him since I have heard his confession.”

“Exactly, Mr. Heron. You are always imposed upon by these hypocrites,” said the surgeon.

“I have not been imposed upon by this man; for hypocrite he certainly is not! Call him ruffian, desperado, or anything you like, except that, for if he had been a hypocrite his condition would have been much improved. He would have imposed on us all, as like as not, and got his ticket of leave by this time,” said the chaplain.

"And because this fellow is so atrocious a criminal that he cannot even feign repentance, you therefore wish to have some favor shown him," said the surgeon.

"No, not so; you are really unjust to the man, Boggs. He is not 'an atrocious criminal,' as you have called him. He has never committed an atrocious crime. He is what you just called him, 'a desperate criminal'—rendered desperate by circumstances, provocations, temptation, that I wish to ameliorate. I want to try an experiment with the man, and I want you to help me."

"Well, what do you want me to do, then?"

"In the first place, give the man as long a convalescence here as you possibly can. Do not report him fit for removal until he shall have got, not only well, but strong."

"I can do that without any transgression of duty."

"Of course, I knew you could, or I should not have asked it."

"Well, what next?"

"Help me to prevent him from being sent back to the chain gang. Join me in recommending him to be assigned to private service," said the chaplain.

"But who could you get to take such a desperate character into his service?" incredulously inquired the surgeon.

"Our host," answered the chaplain.

"What! Have you asked him?" inquired the surgeon, in surprise.

"No, for I did not think—that is, I did not know, that I could get you to come into my plans; but now I shall speak to Mr. Elfinstar, and I feel sure that his noble spirit will lead him to take this poor pariah."

"What! After the ruffian's brutal assault upon his daughter?"

"Yes, and if he hesitated his daughter would be the first to plead for the poor wretch."

"Well, such being the case, I will certainly go heart and hand with you in your efforts to redeem John Hice," said the surgeon.

The interview ended here.

The two gentlemen went into the drawing room to see their host and hostess, and bid them adieu before leaving the Hermitage, for the chaplain had determined to return to town in company with the surgeon.

But they found a collation laid out by the thoughtful hospitality of Mr. Elfinstar, who invited them to sit down and partake of it while their horses were being fed and watered.

They thanked their host and sat down with him and with his daughter to the table; and there the chaplain made his proposition in John Hice's favor.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE CHAPLAIN'S SUCCESS

"TAKE the convict Hice into my service," murmured old Mr. Elfinstar, in a very thoughtful tone.

"I think, if you should be so disposed, you may do it with perfect safety," said the chaplain.

"I do not wish to urge the matter upon you, sir, but if you should want an outdoor servant, I believe you may take this man without risk," added the surgeon.

"I agree with these gentlemen. From my observation of the man, I see, though he has been brutal enough under exasperation, he is not treacherous; he will not rob the house that shelters him, or hurt the hand that feeds him," added Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Dear father! Give this poor soul a chance to save himself! Why do you hesitate?" pleaded Seraph Elfinstar.

"I do so only for your sake, my child," gently answered the old master of the house.

"Then, for my sake, hesitate no longer, my dear father. Take Hice as your assigned servant. I am not in the least afraid of him. He will never hurt me," pleaded the gentle girl.

"But, gentlemen," said Mr. Elfinstar, turning to his guests, "is it ascertained whether the authorities will permit this man, with his terrible record, to be assigned to private service?"

"The authorities will almost always do so when an offer is made for the man, unless he be a capital criminal, subject to the extreme penalty of the law. In this case the offer should come from yourself, and Dr. Boggs and myself will recommend its acceptance in favor of John Hice," said Mr. Heron.

"So, if you do want additional service outdoors, it would be a charity to take Hice."

"I do not particularly want a new servant; but I dare say my gardener can find employment for another. I will make a formal application for Hice," concluded Mr. Elfinstar.

"Oh, thank you, dear father! You have made me so glad," said Seraph.

But she spoke gravely and without the smile that should have accompanied such words. Young, gentle, compassionate as she was, no smile had ever been seen on Seraph Elfinstar's face, and no vestige of color on her white cheeks.

Hamilton Gower, who watched her closely, wondered why this should be so.

Young and beautiful as she was, the girl impressed him as one who had passed through some terrible ordeal, some blasting sorrow! The more he studied Seraph the deeper this impression became.

What had she endured to send the color forever away from her fair cheeks, the smile forever away from her lovely lips?

He was thinking so deeply of the girl now that he scarcely heard the words of the chaplain in response to Mr. Elfinstar's decision. Mr. Heron, however, was saying, with some emotion:

"I believe, sir, that by this act of charity you will save a soul alive!"

"Heaven grant it!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as they all arose from their seats at the table.

"And now," he continued, "if you can wait a little, I will step into the library and write out my application. It will not take me ten minutes."

The surgeon and the chaplain bowed and began to walk up and down the hall while waiting for the aged master of the Hermitage to return with his written application.

Hamilton Gower stood with Seraph Elfinstar out on the front piazza.

He was watching her fair, colorless face and tender blue eyes.

"How is it that you have so much pity for, and so little fear of, that ruffian who assaulted you?" he inquired, in a grave and gentle tone.

"I do not quite know. I never thought about it," she

answered, slowly. Then, with more quickness: "He is to be pitied, is he not? And he is not now to be feared, is he?"

"In his present condition; but when he recovers health and strength and has the freedom of your grounds, where you might encounter him in your walks every day?" inquired the young gentleman.

"Still he would be an object of compassion rather than of terror. The poor slave of the crown would never now hurt me, I know."

"How do you know this, my dear Miss Elfinstar?"

"Because we have taken him in and nursed him, and I read in the poor convict's eyes that he is a man and not a creature lower than the brutes; for even brutes are influenced by kind treatment."

"You are right, Miss Elfinstar. Hice will never harm you."

"No, I feel sure he will not."

"And Hice will not be the only convict servant you have, I think. The chaplain informs me that you have a young girl here from the house of correction—a girl who was convicted of murder and sentenced to death, but whose sentence, on account of her youth, was commuted to transportation for life. Good Heaven, Miss Elfinstar!" exclaimed the young man, breaking off, and catching the young lady in his arms only in time to prevent her from falling to the ground.

He placed her on a settee on the piazza.

She had fainted, and lay as one dead.

"Help here! Help! Dr. Boggs! Ah! for Heaven's sake, come quickly!" cried Hamilton Gower, beside himself with terror. He had never before seen a woman faint.

The surgeon came running, followed by the chaplain.

"What is all this? What has happened?" demanded the doctor.

Then seeing the insensible form of the girl extended on the settee, he stepped quickly to her side, took her wrist in his hand, looked in her face, and turning sharply to Mr. Hamilton Gower, demanded:

"What caused her to faint?"

"I know no more than you do. We were talking of the convict Hice when she suddenly went off in this manner!" exclaimed the young gentleman, who, in his consternation,

had quite forgotten the last turn that the conversation had taken.

Meanwhile, the surgeon was not idle, but was briskly applying all the remedies at hand for the recovery of the girl, who, at length, heaved a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

At this moment her father appeared with a folded paper in hand.

Seraph, seeing him, would have struggled up to a sitting posture had not the surgeon gently put her back, saying:

"Best lie quietly for a few moments, my dear young lady."

"What is the matter, my dear?" anxiously inquired her father, going to her side.

"Nothing, papa, dear, nothing whatever," answered the girl, in as strong a voice as she could command.

"She fainted; but she has recovered, you perceive," said the surgeon.

"Fainted? My dear child! What caused you to faint?" tenderly inquired the old man.

"Oh, dear papa, do not disturb yourself! I am quite well," said Seraph, now rising to a sitting position.

"Gentlemen, who was with my daughter? Can you give me no light on the subject?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, looking from one to the other.

"I was with her, sir, and we were talking quietly together, when suddenly she dropped," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Tuberoses! They are growing in such abundance about the piazza, and their heavy, delicious odor is very oppressive to some delicate organizations," suggested the chaplain.

"Ah, yes! the tuberoses!" assented the surgeon. "I have known them to cause faintness before now."

"Are you sure you are better, my dear?" inquired the old gentleman, anxiously turning to his daughter.

"I am well, papa, dear! really well. Pray pay no more attention to me," said Seraph, earnestly.

"I think you need feel no anxiety on your daughter's account, Mr. Elfinstar! Only do not let her stand over the tuberoses too long," said the surgeon.

"I will have them transplanted this very night," said the old gentleman.

"And now, dear sir, we must take leave, or at least I

must; for I have patients to look after in the convict hospital; but Mr. Heron need not hurry," said the surgeon.

"Yes, yes, Dr. Boggs, I must ride with you! I have been absent from my post more than twenty-four hours."

"Very well, reverend sir, I shall be glad to have your company."

"Well, gentlemen, here is my application to the superintendent of convicts, to have the prisoner of the crown, John Hice, assigned to me as a farm servant. Will you present it, Mr. Heron?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, handing his sealed paper to the chaplain.

"With pleasure, sir! And now we must bid you good-day," said the chaplain, as he shook hands with his host.

The surgeon followed his example. Both gentlemen then bowed to Miss Elfinstar and Mr. Hamilton Gower, and mounted their horses and rode off.

"Are you sure you are all right, my dear?" tenderly inquired the father, of his daughter.

"Oh, yes, papa, dear, I am quite, quite right; do not disturb yourself in the least about me," she answered, earnestly.

"I am glad to hear it; but keep away from the tuberoses, my dear."

"I will be sure to do so, papa."

And Mr. Elfinstar walked into the house, leaving the young lady and gentleman alone together on the piazza.

She was sitting on the settee; he was standing near her.

"I hope you do not suffer any inconvenience from your late attack of faintness," he said, observing that her face was even whiter than its wont.

"No, no; pray do not speak of such a trifle again; I forget it," she replied.

Hamilton Gower bowed obediently. He certainly saw that she wished the subject dropped.

She seemed to be absorbed in thought for a few minutes, and then she suddenly spoke.

"Mr. Gower, please to sit down here beside me. I have something to say to you."

The young gentleman bowed respectfully, and took the indicated seat.

She was silent for a moment, and then said, very quietly:

"Mr. Gower, just before my faintness you were speaking

of a slave of the crown—for they are no more, sir—these wretched convicts—than slaves of the crown, to be worked, scourged, imprisoned, starved, or hired out, to heavy task-masters at the will of their overseers, just as are the slaves of the West Indies and South America at the will of their owners.”

“John Hice?” said the young gentleman, perceiving that she paused.

“Yes; you were speaking of him; and now, perhaps, after what I have said, you will understand my pity for him.”

Hamilton Gower bowed, reverently.

“I do not refer to him just now, however, but to a— young girl who was assigned to my father as his servant. You were speaking of her.”

“Yes, Miss Elfinstar.”

“Do you know who she is?” This question was breathed in an almost inaudible tone.

“I do not. The chaplain merely mentioned to me that your father had already one assigned servant in his house—a young girl—who had been tried for murder, and convicted, and sentenced to death, but whose sentence, on account of her youth, had been commuted to transportation to these penal colonies for life.”

“Did you hear her name?”

“I beg your pardon,” said the young man—for the girl spoke so low that even his quick, attentive ears could not catch her words.

She repeated her question, raising her tone as with an effort.

“Her name was”—Seraph paused and caught her breath as if some spasm of the heart had arrested it for a moment, and then added—“Margaret Campbell.”

“Margaret Campbell!” exclaimed the young man, suddenly thrown off his guard by amazement. “Good heavens! I remember that trial! One of the *causes célèbres* of the age! She is the girl who was convicted of having murdered her infant cousin in order to inherit his property, of which she was the next heir! I knew it required all the political influence of her powerful friends with the ministry to get her death sentence commuted to transportation for life. Did your father know these facts, Miss Elfinstar?”

“Yes,” she breathed, in the same faint voice.

"Then pardon me for saying that I do not understand how you can possibly endure the presence of such a young monster of depravity and cruelty under the same roof with yourself; or how your honored father, even in the cause of humanity, could subject you to such a trial. No wonder you never smile, and never flush. (No wonder your blood is chilled back to your heart,") he mentally added.

"But my father believes, and I know, that, though convicted of the crime, she was guiltless of it," breathed the girl, in the same low voice.

"You say that your father believes this, and you know it. My dear young lady, the circumstantial evidence that proved her guilt was perfectly overwhelming. There was not a single loophole for escape or for doubt."

"That is true; and it convicted her, an innocent child—for she was but fourteen years of age—of a crime which she was not capable of imagining, much less of planning and perpetrating. We know that Margaret Campbell was a young martyr, and no felon," said Miss Elfinstar, solemnly.

"Pardon me; but it seems impossible that anyone should know this, and improbable that any one should even believe it. But you and your honored father have a boundless charity."

"It is not charity in this case, but simply justice. Mr. Gower, I see how difficult it is for you to understand how my father and myself should hold our opinions in the very face of such stubborn facts as were shown on that trial. But, sir, facts are not always truths; and there are also moral and mental and spiritual convictions, true, perfect, absolute, yet which cannot be proved, explained, or utilized in any way. Such are the convictions of my father and myself in regard to Margaret Campbell," concluded the young lady, in a grave and earnest tone.

The gentleman bowed assent. He could do no more nor less.

"I did not, however, bring up this subject for the sake of defending Margaret Campbell, but simply to give you a warning, and ask of you a favor."

"I am entirely at your orders, Miss Elfinstar," said the young gentleman, earnestly.

"I thank you; but it is only this: The name of the un-

happy girl we have been discussing is never mentioned in the presence of my father; therefore, I would entreat you never to allude to her existence in any manner. And now, Mr. Gower, let us drop this subject at once, and forever. Shall I show you the pineries? You have not seen them yet."

Mr. Hamilton Gower bowed, arose to his feet, and offered his arm to the young lady.

She took it with a slight inclination of her head, and led the way around to the rear of the house where the pineries were situated.

No more was said on the subject of the young convict, Margaret Campbell.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HOUSE'S MYSTERY

HE recalled all the circumstances as he had followed them through the daily papers, from the first announcement of the discovery of the murder to the very end of the affair, when the convicted young murderess had had her sentence of death commuted to transportation for life.

He recalled a certain dismal vacation spent at Hawke-wood, when it drizzled incessantly for a month, and when his only excitement was the daily arrival of the *Times*, and how he thought just then that the "Thunderer" was about as heavy as the weather, until one morning when he read the caption of a paragraph as follows:

STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF A CHILD

"The neighborhood of Rosedale has been thrown into considerable excitement by the unaccountable disappearance of George Stuart Douglas Campbell, aged one year, only son and heir of the late George Murray Stuart Campbell, Esq., of Rose Hill Manor, Yorkshire. It appears that on Monday morning last the nurse, on rising, went to the crib as usual to see to her little charge, and was surprised to find the boy gone and the bed clothing in disorder.

"The nurse was not alarmed, however, as she supposed

that the child might have awakened early and been carried off by his mother into her room, which adjoined the nursery, and to which she immediately repaired, only to receive the terrifying report that the boy had not been taken by his mother, or by anyone else, that morning.

"An anxious and thorough examination of the house and grounds was to no effect.

"No clue to the child's disappearance could be gained.

"The utmost anxiety prevails, not only through the house but through the entire neighborhood. The most skillful detectives have been employed to prosecute the search. Large rewards have been offered for news."

This was the first intimation the public received of an event that was destined to develop into one of the most heartrending domestic tragedies that ever desolated a Christian home or shocked a civilized community.

A few days passed, which, of this affair, only chronicled the futile efforts of detectives to discover the fate of the lost boy.

At the end of the week came another sensational paragraph:

"DISCOVERY OF THE MUTILATED REMAINS OF THE CHILD AT
THE BOTTOM OF A DRY WELL.

"No clue has been obtained to the murderer. The coroner's inquest will be held to-day."

Then followed the distressing details of the finding of the body, the grief of the mother, the opinion of the doctor.

And for days after this the papers were half filled with details of the inquest and the examination of innumerable witnesses; but no clue was found to the mystery of the murder.

At last, at the end of the second week, came this:

"THE ROSE HILL MYSTERY.

"Startling Developments—Shocking Juvenile Depravity—
The Arrest of Margaret Mabel Campbell, a Young Girl
of Fourteen Years, and a Cousin of the Deceased, on
the Charge of Having Murdered the Late George
Stuart Douglas Campbell."

Here followed all the details of the circumstances attending the crime, from the first secret clue gained by the detectives to the unraveling of the whole web of mystery, and the discovery of the murderess in the person of a child of fourteen years.

Never had such a shock, from a private source, fallen upon the community.

"She is insane!" was the verdict of public opinion. "Nothing but insanity could have driven so young a girl into such an atrocious crime," people said.

But, ah! the developments of the investigation that immediately followed the arrest showed no insanity on the part of the accused, but the strongest of mercenary motives to inspire, the most consummate art in planning, and the most perfect self-possession in perpetrating the crime.

And then, in due course, followed the trial, during which the Christian world was appalled by the revolting spectacle of a youthful girl arraigned for the deliberate murder of her infant cousin for the sake of inheriting his estates, to which she was the next heir.

Tender as was the age of the criminal, not one sentiment of pity seemed to be felt for her.

People did not hesitate to say that the depraved creature who was old enough in evil to conceive, plan, and perpetrate so atrocious a murder, was quite old enough to suffer the utmost penalties of the law in expiation of her heinous crime.

During the trial all the sickening details of the history of that crime came to light.

And this was the story:

Margaret Mabel Campbell was the orphan niece and the adopted daughter of George Murray Stuart Campbell, of Rose Hill Hall. She was also the legal heiress presumptive of his estates. She was the petted darling of her uncle and aunt, who were old and childless.

Margaret's fair prospects lasted until the death of her aunt, for whom she grieved long and deeply. But she was consoled by the love of her widowed uncle, who for a while lavished all his affections upon her—but only for a while.

Scarcely a year had elapsed from the death of his wife when the old squire of Rose Hill fell a victim to the wiles of an artful widow of impecunious fortunes and with sev-

eral children, made her his wife and brought her home to the Hall.

It was shown that this marriage filled the mind of the child, then just twelve years old, with so much jealous rage that she could scarcely be induced to see or to speak to her new aunt, who, however, was all fascinating blandness and amiability toward the supplanted child, whose bad behavior resulted in her being sent away from the Hall, which had always been her home, to a distant boarding school, where she spent two years.

During these two years two important events occurred at the Hall—the birth of a son and heir, who arrived ten months after the marriage, and the illness of the old squire, who, when he found himself on his deathbed, sent to recall his niece, whom he had never ceased to love.

Margaret Campbell returned to the Hall in time to receive her uncle's dying blessing, attend his funeral and hear his will.

By the will he left her a thousand pounds and a home at the Hall, with her aunt and little cousin, until the coming of age of the latter; but the bulk of his personal property was left, with the whole of the landed estates, to the infant heir.

This child was now nearly a year old, and the idol of the whole household.

Margaret was not sent back to school, but remained at the Hall, and shared the schoolroom with Mrs. Campbell's daughters by her first marriage.

But Margaret made friends with neither stepaunt nor stepcousins. She refused to have anything to do with either Mrs. Campbell or her daughters, whom she seemed to look upon as intruders, or with the infant heir, whom she appeared to consider a usurper.

The governess and all the house servants testified to these facts. They thought that Margaret Campbell hated the new people and infant heir who had supplanted her with a burning hatred.

All this and much more damaging testimony was brought out at the trial.

The detectives had ferreted out and brought home to the accused every fact in the history of the crime. They had shown how the key of Margaret Campbell's little bedroom

on the third floor of the Hall happened to fit the lock of the nursery; how she contrived to push the key of the nursery lock out of its socket, and to do it so slowly that it fell noiselessly down on the thick carpet that covered the floor of the room; how she had then inserted her own key, softly unlocked and opened the door and entered the room in the dead of night, while the nurse was in her deepest slumbers; how she had lifted the sleeping child from its crib, carried it out of the nursery, locked the door behind her and withdrawn the key, and, finally, how she had carried the child out into the rear grounds, cruelly stopped its innocent breath, and then dropped its body into the depths of the dry well.

To this chain of circumstantial evidence there was an eye or ear witness for every link.

Malvina Mattox, the eldest daughter of Mrs. Campbell, and the room-mate of Margaret Campbell, swore and testified that the accused girl had slept with her as usual on the night of the murder, but that she had risen about three o'clock in the morning and gone out of her room, taking the key of their door with her.

A young nursemaid testified that she slept on a cot in the nursery; but, having a "grumbling" tooth, she was wakeful and restless, and that, being between "sleep" and "wake," she saw Miss Margaret bending over the baby's crib that night just after she had heard the nursery clock strike three, but that she was so drowsy just then through the laudanum she had put into her tooth to take much notice, so she shut her eyes and went to sleep.

One of the stablemen testified that about half-past three that morning he had heard a noise outside, and had got out of bed and gone out to see what it was. It was only a stray cow, and he was about to return to his room in the stable loft when he saw Miss Margaret leaning over the dry well.

He was so astonished at seeing her out at such an hour that he could but stand and watch her until she turned from the well and walked to the house and entered it by the front door.

She looked like a person who was walking in sleep, said this witness.

The chain of evidence was so complete that, although the accused was a very young and beautiful girl of rank and

culture, and though she was defended by the very best legal talent in the three kingdoms, the jury, after a short consultation, brought in a verdict of guilty, without any recommendation to mercy—a verdict that was heartily indorsed by the whole nation, and England and the world was threatened with the horrible spectacle of the execution of a girl of fourteen for the premeditated murder of her infant cousin.

One paper brutally declared that, though the girl was of such tender age, the public opinion demanded that she should hang; in the interest of public safety, such venomous and dangerous young reptiles should be promptly stamped out of existence!

The convicted girl seemed to be abandoned by all except the family of her deceased mother, who were persons of wealth and power.

They had employed the best counsel for their unhappy young relative and had paid all the expenses of her defense.

And now they besieged the home secretary with petitions for the commutation of her sentence.

These petitions were at length successful. Margaret Campbell's death sentence was commuted to transportation and penal servitude for life. This commutation was made ostensibly upon account of the very tender age and the doubtful sanity of the condemned girl, but, really, as everyone knew, in deference to the social position and political influence of those who had petitioned for it.

And Margaret Campbell was sent out to Van Dieman's Land in a prison ship, and so she who had once been the heiress presumptive of an old and great estate died that social death which is so immeasurably worse than any physical death.

Mr. Hamilton Gower, walking by the side of Miss Elfinstar, and listening to the rippling music of her voice as she babbled prettily of wild or of cultivated flowers, fruits, or shrubs, remembered how the details of this shocking domestic tragedy had formed the staple interest of the papers, in which they were published from day to day for many weeks, during which he had passed his dismal, drizzling holiday at Hawke Hall.

And now that he had long forgotten all about Margaret Campbell and her unnatural crime, to think that the whole

subject should be recalled to his memory here in the wilds of Tasmania and he should find himself under the same roof with the young murderess, where she was serving out her sentence of penal servitude under an ameliorated form and in the house of a humanitarian.

But, Mr. Hamilton Gower asked himself, was humanity the only motive that induced the master of the Mountain Hermitage to take the convict girl into his own service?

Or, good Heaven! might he not himself be one of those "relations of her deceased mother"—one of those wealthy and powerful men who had paid for her defense and petitioned successfully for the commutation of her sentence?

If so, had he come out to the colonies and settled here for the express purpose of taking his unfortunate young relative, whom he believed to be innocent, into his own service as his assigned servant, that by so doing he might soften the severity of her fate?

This theory would account for everything that had seemed so strange in his manner of life. But, then, had he not done this at an immense sacrifice to his own innocent and beautiful young daughter?

Hamilton Gower longed to know the truth.

He dared not hint the subject to Miss Elfinstar, or to her father. She had warned him that the subject was a most painful one to the master of the Mountain Hermitage, and she had asked him, Hamilton Gower, never to allude to it in the presence of Mr. Elfinstar.

And now it occurred to him that this very extreme sensitiveness seemed to argue that the young convict was something more to him than a merely assigned servant.

No; Mr. Hamilton Gower could get no information from the family as to the real relations existing between them and their convict servant.

He might ask the chaplain; but would it not seem treacherous to seek that information outside of the house which he was forbidden to obtain within it? Would it not seem like trying to pry into the secrets of a family who were extending their hospitality to him?

No; he would not ask the chaplain anything about Mr. Elfinstar's assigned servant.

While all these thoughts had been passing through the young gentleman's mind he had visited the pinery, the fern-

ery, the apiary, the aviary, and many other objects of interest on the estate, and had heard and answered the explanations and comments made by his companion.

Now they were on their way to the house in response to the first dinner bell.

At dinner Mr. Hamilton Gower could not help watching the father and daughter with new interest.

Gentle, grave, and friendly in their demeanor toward each other and toward their guest, they gave no cause for criticism.

Yet why had they, wealthy and cultivated gentleman and lady, come to this mountain wilderness in a convict colony at the antipodes of civilization to make their home for life?

Why had they no intercourse whatever with the few respectable English colonists? Why did they keep themselves apart from all their neighbors?

Why did they take so very deep an interest in the fate of the convicted murderess, Margaret Campbell, that, although she was their assigned servant, working out her sentence of penal servitude in their house, they could not bear the subject of her crime and conviction mentioned in their presence?

And where, meanwhile, about the house was this convict servant employed? He thought he had seen all the housemaids there. They were stout, red-cheeked, laughing English girls, with whose appearance it was simply impossible to associate crime or tragedy of any sort.

Margaret Campbell was not to be found among them, certainly. Perhaps she was the lady's maid of Miss Elfinstar, and dwelt in her private apartments. But, oh! what a companion for Seraph! For he, Hamilton Gower, did not share the faith of his host and hostess in the innocence of their convict protégée. The evidence given at the trial made it quite impossible for him to do so.

But what was this atrocious young criminal to the Elfinstars?

There seemed to be, under all the circumstances, but one answer to the question. She was a very near relative—probably the sister's child, the niece of the old gentleman and the first cousin of the young lady, and for her sake the father and daughter had expatriated themselves from all they held dear in their native land and come to the

penal settlement, this savage land of convicts, bushmen, and wild beasts!

While Hamilton Gower was turning these subjects over in his own mind, he became so abstracted as to draw the kindly attention of his host, who, turning to him, said, gently:

"I fear you find our Mountain Hermitage rather dull, my friend."

"On the contrary, I find your home so full of interest that I have really been tempted into trespassing on your hospitality much too long, and even now I very much lament the necessity of leaving you," replied the young gentleman, with more truth than usually goes to the making up of courteous speeches.

"I hope you are not going to leave us soon," said his host, in a tone of such sincerity as could not be doubted.

"I was thinking of saying good-by to-morrow morning," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"I beg you, as a personal favor, to change your purpose, and—unless business should call you away—remain with us for some weeks," pleaded the old gentleman, with such an earnestness of manner that could not be mistaken for mere politeness, while the young lady looked on, silent, but interested.

"You are exceedingly kind, and I thank you heartily. Nothing could give me more pleasure than to prolong my stay. I am only a tourist who left England about sixteen months ago, to give myself the advantage of a couple of years' travel in foreign lands. I have really no serious business to call me away, while you can endure my society," replied the young gentleman, frankly.

"Then pray consider yourself even as a son of the house as long as you can endure us," said Mr. Elfinstar, cordially, while the nearest approach to a smile that the young man had ever seen here beamed in the eyes of Seraph Elfinstar.

"I cannot but express my wonder and gratification that you should receive me—a total stranger—with as much of courtesy and confidence as though I had come accredited to you by letters of introduction from the most reliable sources," said the young stranger.

"There are faces, or, I should say, countenances, my dear sir, which are sufficient letters of introduction to observant

and thoughtful men. Your countenance, I beg leave to say, is such a one, in its character of expression. Besides, you forget the vital, the invaluable service you rendered us in rescuing my daughter from the hands of that maddened ruffian."

"Oh, Mr. Elfinstar, I was but too highly favored of fortune to have the opportunity of so serving Miss Elfinstar. I am but too happy to have been of use to her!" warmly responded the young man.

It was evident that the spirits of both the father and the daughter were raised by the prospect of retaining their guest for some time longer.

After dinner the two gentlemen went into the rear room to visit the wounded convict, whom they found awake and alone.

He did not now require the constant attendance of a nurse.

Mr. Elfinstar sat down near the head of the bed and Mr. Hamilton Gower near the foot.

"How do you find yourself, Hice?" inquired the former.

"Better than I expected or wished to be, sir," answered the convict, with some return to his former surliness.

"You are going to get well, you know."

"Ay, I know it, sir, more's the pity!"

"Why do you say that, my man?" kindly inquired the old gentleman.

"Because if the parson could have given me a passport into Paradise, or even into Purgatory, with some hope of Paradise after a few thousand years, it would have been better for me to die than to go back to that infernal chain," replied the convict, with a countenance darkened by despair.

"But, my man, the parson could have given you no such passport, as you know very well."

"Oh, I know!" growled the wretch.

"Nor is it likely that you were prepared to meet your God," mildly added the old man.

"Oh, I'd have risked it! I'd have taken my chance with Him rather than have gone back to the chain gang."

"But you will not be sent back to the chain gang."

"What!" exclaimed the convict, incredulously.

"You will never be sent back to the chain gang. At the

intercession of the chaplain and the surgeon, you will be assigned to private service."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed the man. "That's a good un! That's a likely joke, that is! The parson and the doctor are very kind; but who in the deuce is going to take me for a servant?"

"I will do so, if you choose to serve me," replied Mr. Elfinstar, gently.

The convict raised himself up on his elbow and stared at the speaker in utter amazement for a good long time, as it seemed to the spectators. Then he requested:

"Please say that over again, slowly, so that I can hear and understand."

The kind old man complied.

"I will gladly take you into my service as my gardener, if you should be willing to remain with me in that capacity," he replied, with some improvements upon his former words.

The convict, who had listened and gazed with fixed attention, now closed his eyes, fell back on the pillow, and turned away from his kind benefactor.

No one knew in what spirit the half insane creature had received this proposition. It looked very much as if he had met it with surly ingratitude.

But presently the bedclothes began to move with more and more force, and it was seen that the man under them was sobbing with increasing violence that shook his whole frame.

This continued some minutes, during which the two gentlemen waited in considerate silence for this storm of emotion to subside.

At length, still sobbing, the convict put one hand out from under the coverlet and felt about blindly.

Mr. Elfinstar placed his own hand within that seeking one, and the convict drew it toward him and pressed it passionately to his lips, to his heart, and to his tearful eyes, before he released it.

Then, after drying his face with the hem of his sheet, he turned to his benefactor and said, in faltering tones:

"Pardon me, sir, for not thank——" And he broke down again.

"Say no more, my poor fellow! Your strong emotion speaks more than words," said Mr. Elfinstar, kindly.

"You will take me for your gardener, sir?" inquired Hice, recovering himself with an effort.

"Yes, if you like. I have already made the application to the commandant."

"I am called the worst man in the penal settlements! I have been threatened with Norfolk Island."

"We will give you a chance here," quietly observed the old gentleman.

"I assaulted your young daughter and nearly killed her with terror. But I swear by all I hold most sacred on earth—I swear by the grave of my mother that I never intended to do her any personal injury! I only meant to take her gold chain because I was starving and desperate!"

"You will never be tempted to such violence again," said Mr. Elfinstar.

"And you pardon me all that? And you take me out of the hell of the chain gang in the quarries and put me into the heaven of your garden! For burning stones, and blistering heat, and dust, and squalor, and degrading slavery, you give me trees, flowers, beauty, cleanliness, pleasant work and kind treatment!" said the man, inspired by the goodness of his benefactor.

"It is a pleasure to us to do all this," replied Mr. Elfinstar.

"But the young lady whom I assaulted and terrified? She will never venture into her own garden. The sight of the ruffian who assaulted her would overcome her with horror."

"Not so; my daughter is courageous and sensible. She understands. She will speak pardon to you in person, and then she will be quite willing to forget that adventure in the wilderness."

"Oh, tell her—pray tell her—that I never meant to do her a personal injury!" pleaded Hice.

"You said that before, and your words have been reported to Miss Elfinstar. She believed them," explained Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"And now here is Mrs. Annis with your supper. We will leave you to enjoy it. And then, sleep well," said Mr. Elfinstar, rising.

"Sir," said Hice, taking the hand of his benefactor and holding it, while he gazed gratefully and affectionately into his face, "I have been called brute, monster, ruffian, desperado, devil; but my worst enemy never called me a hypocrite. Oh, please to believe me, therefore, when I tell you that I think you have saved my soul!"

"Under the Divine Providence, Hice," added the old man.

"Under the Divine Providence, sir," assented the convict.

And the two gentlemen left him with his new hopes.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LOVE IN A WILDERNESS

THE morning after the events recorded in the last chapter the surgeon appeared at the Mountain Hermitage, bringing with him the necessary documents that transferred John Hice, a prisoner of the crown, sentenced to seven years of transportation and hard labor, to the special service of Theobald Elfinstar, Esq., of Mount Humboldt.

When Mr. Elfinstar and Dr. Boggs went to the bedside of the convict with this news, the man warmly grasped the hand of his new master and turned a grateful look upon the surgeon, saying:

"I don't want to disparage medical science, doctor, but—the news you bring me is more healing than all your drugs."

"Glad to hear you say so; it may save the government some expense in medicines. And, now, you have only got to get well as soon as possible," said the surgeon, good-humoredly.

"And you shall not be hurried. You shall be strong enough to desire work before you are put to it," added Mr. Elfinstar.

This was the surgeon's last visit; he took leave of his patient, saying that he should not visit him again unless he was sent for.

He dined with the family, and then bade them adieu and returned to Hobart Town.

The next day the convalescent man sat up and read books provided for him by Mr. Elfinstar.

The third day he walked out in the garden to view the scene of his future labors.

And on the Monday of the next week he went to work, under the instructions of the head gardener, a gray-haired old man who had now more knowledge than strength, and who was, therefore, very glad of an able-bodied assistant to relieve him.

This old man, whose name was Larry Tod, lived alone in the gardener's cottage, which was large enough to accommodate a family had he owned one; but he was a bachelor, with an aged sister for a housekeeper, and so he found plenty of room in his house for John Hice.

Many domestic servants might object to associate with an assigned convict; but not those of the Mountain Hermitage. The spirit of the master pervaded the whole establishment, from the dignified housekeeper and pompous butler down to the meekest kitchenmaid and the humblest stableboy.

His will was supreme, and his word was law to the people who revered and loved him.

If John Hice was good enough to be received into their master's service, he was good enough to be received into their company, they might have argued, if any questions as to the propriety of the arrangement had come up.

But no such question was started. They accepted their master's act as a matter of course.

Mr. Elfinstar provided his new servant with clothes, books, writing materials, and, in fact, all that the man needed to make him comfortable in the gardener's cottage, and to help on his mental, moral, and religious improvement.

Many persons might have thought that the old gentleman went too far, much too far, in his kindness to the convict.

Those who, like the Scribes and Pharisees of the first century, who denounced Our Savior for His tender mercy to publicans and sinners, and, like the practical philosophers of our own times, who criticize the "sentimental" sympathy of Christians and philanthropists for prisoners and criminals, might have severely censured the course of old Theobald Elfinstar toward his convict servant.

But the Lord will judge.

John Hice was removed from want and temptation. He was relieved from the one great burden that had so long oppressed his conscience and so nearly driven him mad—the imagined murder of his brother. He was beginning a new life.

He said that he was happy, and he looked so. He said that he had freedom instead of chains; cleanness for dirt; flowers for stones; kind words for threats; good for evil!

And not only was the redeemed sinner happy, but everyone on the premises was happier in witnessing his happiness.

The first smile that Hamilton Gower had ever seen on the beautiful, bloodless face of Seraph Elfinstar beamed upon the “assigned servant,” when, in walking in the garden, they came upon him at work gathering fruit and flowers for the dinner table.

But Mr. Hamilton Gower had his own embarrassments under the circumstances. He was very glad indeed that the blood of Hice did not rest on his soul; for, however justifiable had been that shot which had laid the desperado low, and rescued the young lady from peril, had it proved a fatal one, its consequences must have overshadowed the memory of the young gentleman who had fired it with gloomiest remorse.

Yes, he was very glad that John Hice still lived; but, as has been said, he had his own embarrassments under the circumstances.

He had a secret which he half believed he ought to impart to that man, and yet which he would have guarded from all men with his very life.

Mr. Elfinstar’s household attended no place of public worship. They were too far distant from any church to enjoy such a privilege.

But the old gentleman, on every Sunday morning, assembled his whole family and all his servants in the dining room of the Hermitage, and there he held the services and read an excellent sermon selected from the writings of the most eloquent Christian writers and pulpit orators.

Of late, all his sermons were selected with a view to the case of John Hice, who was always of his little congregation the most unaffectedly interested.

In this quiet manner life went on at the Mountain Hermitage for a month longer. Young Hamilton Gower and Seraph Elfinstar, thrown constantly together as they were, formed a strong attachment for each other.

Not a word of love had been spoken between them.

Hamilton Gower, a stranger guest, received with confidence into the bosom of the family, would not betray that confidence by wooing the daughter of the house without first gaining the consent of her father, so he never "breathed his love" in words; but, ah! he could not always control his tones and looks; these betrayed the passion that was glowing in his bosom for the beautiful girl, while her downcast eyes, blushing cheeks, and trembling frame, when he was near, inspired him with hope that his love was returned.

The fifth week of his sojourn at the Mountain Hermitage was drawing to a close, and he was beginning to fear, in spite of the kindness of his host and hostess, and the pleasure they seemed to take in his society, and the delight he felt in theirs, that he was unreasonably prolonging his visit and must make up his mind to say good-by.

But not until he had asked permission of Mr. Elfinstar to propose marriage to his daughter—and not to go away to a distance. Oh, no! he could not leave Seraph Elfinstar so long! He would only go to Hobart Town and take up his abode there for the period of his self-imposed exile, which was now within seven months of its close; and from that point he would visit his betrothed as frequently as possible, and when the time for his return to his own country should arrive he would make her his wife and take her with him.

These were his thoughts and intentions. He felt not the slightest doubt of his success in wooing.

He knew, without vanity, that his love was returned. He knew that he himself was esteemed by the father of his beloved. And he knew that his social position warranted him in asking the hand of Miss Elfinstar in marriage.

He felt that he must throw off his masquerading disguise, however, and declare his real name and rank and his motives for dropping them for a season, before he could gain Mr. Elfinstar's consent to the desired marriage with his daughter.

This the young gentleman determined to do at once, before he should bid adieu to the family.

But his purpose was interrupted and his visit prolonged by an unexpected event.

One morning—the very morning of the day on which he had resolved to ask a private interview with Mr. Elfinstar for the purpose of soliciting the hand of his daughter—while the family were seated at breakfast the Hall footman came in, touched his forehead and said:

“If you please, sir, here is Mr. Tod asking to see you.”

“The gardener! Tell him to come in here,” said the old gentleman.

The footman retreated and soon showed in Larry Tod, who stood bowing at the door, with his gray head bare, and showing signs of disturbance.

“Well, Tod, what is it?” kindly inquired his master.

“Oh, if you please, sir, it is Hice!” said the old man, fumbling over his gray straw hat that he held with both hands down against his knees.

“Hice! What of him?” uneasily inquired Mr. Elfinstar, while his daughter and his guest looked anxiously on.

What on earth were they going to hear about Hice? What fault, what complaint, or what misfortune connected with the assigned servant had the old head gardener come to report?

“What of Hice? What’s the matter with him?” again inquired the master of the house, perceiving that Tod fumbled his hat in embarrassed silence.

“I’m afeard, sir, as he is gone, sir!” said the old gardener, solemnly.

“Gone!” echoed the three persons at the table in one breath.

Had John Hice really gone—bolted—run away from the place—betrayed his master’s and his benefactor’s confidence? It could not be so! What a text for the practical philosophers, the Scribes and Pharisees of the present day, who have no sympathy for convicts, to expatiate upon!

“‘Gone,’ did you say? John Hice gone?” mournfully inquired Mr. Elfinstar, as if he could not believe the evidence of his own ears.

“I’m afeard so, sir,” sighed the old man, sadly shaking his head.

"When did he go?" demanded Mr. Elfinstar.

"I don't exactly know, sir; but I think it must have been some time in the night."

"When did you find it out?"

"This morning, sir, when he didn't come to his breakfast, and I went to look for him and found he was gone."

"Poor fellow! Poor, misguided fool! I am very, very sorry for him!" sighed the old gentleman.

And the two young people looked the grief and disappointment that they did not otherwise express.

"So be I, sir," groaned the old gardener—"as sorry as if the lad was my own son, I be!"

"What caused him to go off so suddenly, do you think, Tod?" inquired Mr. Hamilton Gower.

"Lor' A'mighty knows, your honor, for I don't!"

"Had you any misunderstanding with him?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar.

"I beg pardon, your honor!" replied the perplexed old man.

"Had you quarreled—you and he?" inquired the master of the house, putting his question in another form.

"Quarreled? Lord love your honor, no, sir; we was the very best of friends! He eat his supper with us last night as hearty and as cheerful as ever you see a man, and after supper he sat down and finished a pretty little wicker workbasket as he had worked on evenings for a week or more, and he give it to my sister, and then he played checkers with me until bedtime, and then we had evening worship, sir, he a-listening to the Word and joining in the hymn and the prayer, as attentive and respectful as could be! Ah! it is a satisfaction to think he did that, sir, if he has gone! And he took his candle and went upstairs as blithe as a bird, bidding us good-night with a smile! Ah, little did I think then as that was the last time he would ever bid us good-night, sir! But it was so, your honor sees; for when I went to look for him this morning I found as he was gone."

"The miserable boy!" murmured the old gentleman, all his faith in human nature threatened with death by the defection of John Hice. "The poor fool! Well, well, the commandant was right, I fear, when he said that it was hardly possible to reform a convict! My dears, I am more

distressed at this affair than you could believe!" he added, turning to the young lady and gentleman who were listening with attentive, sorrowful faces.

"Indeed, we know that you are, sir," said Mr. Hamilton Gower.

Seraph said nothing; she seemed overwhelmed with surprise and disappointment at the reported conduct of this assigned servant.

That he to whom they had forgiven so much! for whom they had done so much! and even run such risks!—that he should have proved so deceitful, so ungrateful, so irreclaimable. Oh! and so insane, so idiotic as to run away from a good home and kind friends, and destroy his only hope and chance of redemption and happiness in this world! What could he expect would be the end of such conduct? He never could get away from the island. That would be utterly impossible. He must either starve in the wilderness, as he had been in danger of doing once, or he must be recaptured and carried back to the chain gang. The commandant would never let him out to private service again.

"No, they do say that these men are never to be reformed. Yet I had hoped so much from that boy. But perhaps he only longed for full liberty, poor wretch, and only ran away to get it! A fatal mistake! But perhaps he did no worse; took nothing with him! Say, Tod! when you went into his room and found him gone, did you miss anything?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar.

"Not a single thing, your honor! Everything was there in its place!" replied the gardener.

"Then he took nothing with him?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"He took nothing with him, I say?"

"Who, sir?"

"John Hice."

"John Hice, sir?"

"Yes, yes, he, John Hice!" exclaimed Mr. Elfinstar, rather impatiently, while the two young people listened with the deepest interest.

If it could be proved, now, that John Hice was only a runaway, not a relapsed thief!

But the old man fumbled his hat and rumbled his hair,

and looked utterly perplexed; at length he said, deprecatingly:

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't understand—I don't, indeed."

"Why, surely I speak plainly enough! I ask you if John Hice took anything away with him when he went off," repeated Mr. Elfinstar, now speaking with great patience and distinctness.

But the old gardener opened his eyes to their widest extent and stared with all his might.

"Well, well; can't you speak?" demanded the old gentleman, relapsing into impatience.

"Beg pardon again, sir; but did your honor ask me if—if John Hice took anything away with him when he went off?" slowly and carefully repeated the old gardener.

"Yes; that is just exactly what I did ask you—did John Hice take anything away with him when he left? Did he, now?" curtly demanded Mr. Elfinstar.

"Why, lor, no, sir, of course he didn't," replied the gardener, with a look of amazement.

"Well, then, why couldn't you have said so before, Tod? He took nothing. I am very glad to hear it."

"Why, how could he—begging your honor's pardon? The Word says: 'We brought nothing into his world, and it is certain that we can take nothing out of it.' So how could that poor lad take anything away with him?" incisively questioned the old man.

It was now the turn of all Tod's hearers to stare.

"What—what—what do you mean by that?" demanded Mr. Elfinstar in words, while his two young companions asked the same question in looks.

"Why, sir, I mean as he couldn't, your honor knows, any more than anyone else who ever departed this life!" said the old gardener, whose patience was beginning to be sorely tried.

"'Departed this life!' Good Heaven! You do not mean to say that John Hice has departed this life!" exclaimed Mr. Elfinstar, rising from his chair in great excitement.

"Yes, master; yes, your honor; I'm afeard so, sir; indeed, I'm as good as sartin it is so."

"But you said he had run away!"

"Oh, no, dear sir; your honor must 'a' mis-heard me. I

could never 'a' said John Hice had run away, because he hadn't. He never would 'a' run away, poor lad! He never would 'o' done it! He was too happy, sir."

"But you really did tell us that he had bolted," put in Mr. Hamilton Gower, in a tone of perplexity.

"Oh, no, dear sir; how very much mistaken you are. It never entered my head to accuse that poor lad of bolting; which I'm sure it never entered his head to do it, sir. Poor lad!"

"But, Mr. Tod," said Seraph, "you surely told us that he had gone off?"

"Did I use them very words, miss?"

"Indeed you did, Mr. Tod. You said you went to look for him and found him gone—and we thought you meant he had run away," gravely explained Seraph.

"Then if I did, miss—for I disremember what I did say exactly, only I know that it wasn't that he had run away or bolted—but if I said he had gone, I only meant that he had gone to his final home, miss; that was all!"

"Come, Gower; let us go down to the gardener's cottage and see what really has happened. The poor fellow has ~~not~~ run away, thank Heaven! and he can't be dead, you know; it is out of the question! I saw him and talked with him myself yesterday at sunset, and he was in excellent health and spirits then. It is all nonsense about his being dead, you know."

"Oh, my dear father, I am so relieved to think ~~he~~ has not run away! I—I really think I would rather hear that he had died, indeed, than that he had so betrayed ~~us~~ and destroyed himself."

"I agree with you entirely, my dear; but I hope that neither is the case. Come, Mr. Gower," said the old gentleman, leading the way, and followed by his guest and his gardener.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT PEACE

THE party walked down all the terraces to the lowest plain of the grounds, where the cottage stood in its ~~place~~ of shade trees close by the garden gate.

They were met at the door by Sarah Tod, the gardener's old sister, and she was weeping, with her apron held up to her eyes.

"This is bad news I hear, Sarah, but I hope not so bad as reported. How is Hice?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, as he stopped.

"Oh, sir, he is gone, poor lad! he is gone! and it is so sudden! Oh! it is so sudden!" wept the woman.

"It is so sudden that it cannot be true! He had nothing the matter with him!"

"Oh, sir, it is true! too true! He is gone, sir! He is gone! His body is stiff and cold! I have just straightened it out!" sobbed the woman.

"Let me see it," said Mr. Elfinstar, gently pushing his way past the weeping woman, and entering the house.

"It is upstairs on his own bed, sir; there's where I laid it out, sir. I'll show you the way."

"I can find it. I know his room. Come, Gower," said the old gentleman, leading the way upstairs, followed by his guest and the gardener's sister.

They entered the front room over the parlor—a bedroom as clean, neat, and dainty as the chamber of a young girl. There were white muslin curtains to the one front window, a white draped dressing table under it and a white bed, on which,

"Calm as a child that sinks to sleep,"

the body of the young gardener lay.

Sarah Tod turned down the sheet and revealed the peaceful face, to which death had given the touch of refinement it had lacked in life.

"Poor fellow! Oh, poor fellow!" murmured Mr. Elfinstar, placing his hand gently upon the pale, cold brow. "And we thought he had run away! How unjust we have been in our judgment of him! He is gone, indeed! But, oh, how much better that he should be gone as he has than that he should have gone as we supposed him to have done. And, great Heaven, Mr. Gower, how much he looks like you now!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Elfinstar.

But Hamilton Gower had turned away and was apparently gazing out of the window.

A terrible fear had seized him that this sudden death of

his poor, unacknowledged half-brother might have been caused by the wound he himself had given him five weeks before. He had read of cases where a shot would lie *perdu* in some inaccessible portion of a man's body, and the man would get entirely well and go about his usual business, until suddenly the shot would drop into some vital part and the man fall dead.

It made him ill to think that such might have been the case with John Hice!

"What could ha' caused the poor lad to go off as sudden as all this, sir?" inquired Sarah Tod of the old squire.

"I cannot imagine. Poor boy! Poor boy! I must send for the coroner and also for the surgeon. There must be an inquest, and there should also be a post-mortem examination. What do you think, Gower?" inquired Mr. Elfinstar, as he covered up the face of the dead and turned to his guest at the window.

"Oh, yes, sir, yes! a post-mortem examination is absolutely necessary," answered the young gentleman, who knew that such an examination would show the cause of death and end the suspense which he felt that he could not long endure.

"Tod, hasten to the stable and tell Stackpole to saddle a horse and get himself ready to ride to Hobart Town, then to come for further orders up to the house. I must write for the coroner and for the surgeon. Poor lad! Poor lad! He said that garden was his heaven; he had 'flowers for stones'! Ah, I hope he has a better heaven now. Seraph will be sorry; Seraph will be very sorry. Still, it is better so than that he should have backslidden and run away," concluded the old gentleman, as he turned to leave the room.

"Infinitely better so, sir," assented the younger one, as he followed.

Sarah Tod remained in the room, watching the dead.

Larry Tod had hastened to the stables to convey his master's orders to the groom.

Mr. Elfinstar and Mr. Hamilton Gower walked slowly and thoughtfully back to the house.

Mr. Elfinstar went at once to his study to write a note to the coroner and another to the surgeon of the convict barracks.

Mr. Hamilton Gower went to find Miss Elfinstar, who was still anxiously waiting in the breakfast room.

"Well?" she exclaimed, rising to meet him as he was about to enter.

"It is true; poor Hice has passed away," he replied, as he handed his hat and gloves to a footman in attendance and advanced toward her.

She sank silently into a chair. He seated himself near her.

"It was fearfully sudden," she said, at last.

"It was, indeed," responded her companion.

"What was the cause of death?" she inquired, in the low and awe-stricken tone in which such questions, under such circumstances, are always asked.

"No one knows as yet. We all heard what Tod said: Hice went to bed at his usual hour in good health and spirits. This morning he was found dead in his bed, having apparently died quietly in his sleep."

"It is very strange and very, very sad," murmured Seraph.

"To us it seems sad; but is it really so, under the circumstances?"

"No, it is well," she said, but she said it with a sigh.

A little movement in the hall caused her to rise and step out.

It was only made by the announcement of the mounted messenger come to take his orders from the master of the house.

The hall door stood open, the tall, gaunt figure of Jonas Stackpole within it, and a powerful roadster, saddled and bridled for the journey, waited without on the upper terrace. A footman had taken the message to his master in the library.

The old gentleman soon came out with two letters in his hands.

He glanced through the hall door, and seeing the saddled horse, gave a short nod of approval, and said:

"Ah, you have got Goliath! Quite right. You cannot overwork him between this and the city. Don't spare him, therefore, but take these letters, ride as fast as you can to Hobart Town, and deliver them to their addresses. Then put up your horse at the Royal Albert, and let him rest

until evening. I mean until about four o'clock in the afternoon. You had better give yourself time to get home by daylight:

Jonas Stackpole took the letters and bowed, saying:

"I will be careful to follow your directions, sir."

Then he went out, threw himself on horseback, and galloped away.

"Papa, can I do anything?" inquired Seraph.

"In what manner, my dear?"

"Why—at the gardener's cottage."

"Oh, no, my dear, nothing as yet. Nothing must be disturbed until the coroner has viewed the body. You had best go about your usual avocations, my dear, or—Gower, take her out for a walk."

The young gentleman was only too glad to avail himself of this privilege. He went and took the young lady's garden hat from its hook in the back passage and put it on her head with a bow; then, with his own "wide-awake" in his hand, he offered her his arm.

"I do not wish to go far, and not into the garden this morning. Take me to Gehenna," she said, as she passed her hand through his arm.

"Gehenna!" he echoed, in some surprise.

"Yes; it is at the back of this plateau, and under the shadow of the precipice. I called it Gehenna. I like to go there sometimes, as the Jews like to go to their 'chamber of desolation,' " she explained.

"Show me the way to Gehenna, then. With you by my side it will be paradise," he whispered; and the next moment he could have bitten his silly young tongue off for making such a stupid and frivolous speech.

But happily she took no notice. She was thinking of more serious subjects than pretty speeches from a lover's lips.

She led him to a thicket in the extreme rear of the grounds and under the deep shadow of the precipice.

It was a gloomy, savage, and terrific scene of jagged rocks, thrown up in piles as by some mad convulsion of nature, deep clefts and treacherous holes, from which grew up gigantic thorns and thistles, and noxious weeds from which exhaled pungent odors, and about which crept venomous reptiles.

Hamilton Gower glanced around with feelings of disgust and abhorrence.

"Do not stay here, Miss Elfinstar! The place is repulsive and even dangerous!" he said.

"I call it Gehenna," she replied.

"Let me take you back into the cultivated grounds. Why will you come here?"

"It suits my mood."

"But you might be bitten by some venomous reptile or stung by some noxious beetle."

"I never have been hurt by either; but you might be less fortunate. I beg you will leave me here and return to the house."

"As if I could do that!"

"But the place is as familiar to me as any arbor in our gardens. I come here very often."

"Not alone, I hope."

She hesitated for a moment, and then answered:

"No, not quite alone. I never come here quite alone. I always bring—Margaret Campbell."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the young man.

"Why, what is the matter? Has any reptile stung you?" she inquired, with the faintest dash of sarcasm in her sweet-toned voice.

"Your words have stung me, Miss Elfinstar!" he said, with a shudder.

"But why should they?" she persisted.

"Because they present a horrible picture!—the picture of such a companion in such a place for you!"

"You are very unjust and cruel in your judgment of that poor girl."

"I do not judge her. I do not wish to get near enough to the child murderer, even in thought, for that process. I should never trouble myself about her did she not affect your life so disastrously! You must know that her sphere is deadly to you."

"Well, I cannot help it," said Seraph, with a profound sigh, "I cannot get rid of her, that is certain."

"And she takes you—as evil spirits took those whom they entered—into the wilderness—into such a wilderness of rocks and pitfalls, noxious weeds and venomous reptiles as this!"

"Yes, she does do this!" sighed Seraph, with a look of suffering, patient resignation that seemed to break the heart of her lover.

"Miss Elfinstar," he began, in a grave, firm voice—"pardon me for what may seem to be an impertinent criticism, but it is only my deep interest in your welfare that urges me to say that your honored father, in his wide humanity, overlooks the interest of his child when he subjects her to the fearful trial of this girl's company."

"Poor old father! I do not think he can help what he does, Mr. Gower; but if you please, we will talk no more of Margaret Campbell. She is a most unprofitable subject. Let me try to forget her, for a while. And come up here to the top of this pile of rocks, where we can sit secure from the contact of noxious weed or the approach of venomous reptiles," she added, as, with the agility of a kid, she climbed to the top of a pile of rocks "at random thrown," and seated herself.

He followed her slowly and with difficulty, and when he reached her he said, with a smile:

"You perceive that I am not a mountain fawn like you; I am an amphibious creature of the seashore. If this were a rowing or a swimming match, now, I might do myself some credit; but climbing? No! that is not in my line!"

She spoke gravely, without replying to his words:

"Sit down here beside me. From this point we can see all the desolation around us."

He placed himself beside her, with a suppressed groan; he could scarcely endure the morbid mood in which he found her.

"See," she continued, "'the Valley of the Shadow of Death' lies below us. The shadow of the precipice behind us has cast the blackness of darkness over the vale; the thicket of pine trees before us conceals the house and all the beauty of the grounds below them. 'The abomination of desolation' is around us."

The young man heard her with pain. He made no comment; but he thought within himself: This lovely girl's mind has been devastated by association with that dark criminal. But never mind! never mind, my darling! In a little while, please Heaven, I will take you away from this Hades haunted by devils, and carry you to my own

beautiful home by the open sea, where you will forget all these horrors.

After this she sank into silence, and the two sat together there for about twenty minutes, without exchanging as many words.

Then, to his infinite relief, she arose and said, wearily: "Let us go home. It is wrong of me to leave my father alone so long."

She went down from that chaos of rocks as easily as she had climbed up. He descended with more care and trouble, and then they crossed the valley, passed through the belt of pine woods, and entered upon the cultivated grounds around the Hermitage.

They did not linger here, but went immediately into the house and joined Mr. Elfinstar in the parlor.

Early in the afternoon the coroner arrived, accompanied by the regimental surgeon, Dr. Boggs, and the prison physician, Dr. Briggs.

Mr. Elfinstar received them gravely, but politely, and immediately explained the case upon which he had summoned them.

The three officers decided to view the body together, and then to let the surgeons make a post-mortem examination, and report whether an inquest was necessary.

This they did under the auspices of their host, who conducted them to the cottage, and left them in the death chamber.

The two doctors conducted the autopsy in the presence of the coroner, while Mr. Elfinstar and Mr. Hamilton Gower remained in the parlor below to hear the result.

The most anxious, perhaps the only anxious person in the house was Hamilton Gower, who dreaded to hear that Hice had, after all, died from the effects of his wound.

After two hours the doctors and the coroner came downstairs, and the two arose to hear the report.

"There is no necessity for an inquest. Hice died from natural causes. I have given a certificate to that effect," said Dr. Briggs.

"Was his death in any manner accelerated by the wound he received five weeks ago?" anxiously inquired Hamilton Gower.

"Not in the least degree. I have said that the man died

from natural causes—from congestion of the brain, as a matter of detail,” replied the surgeon.

“Thank Heaven it was not from the wound!” was the mental reflection of Hamilton Gower.

Mr. Elfinstar then asked the three officers to go up to the house and take some refreshments before they should return to town.

The whole party of gentlemen then left the cottage.

In the dining room of the Hermitage they found a most inviting collation of cold meats, pastry, cakes, fruit, and light wines.

The three officers sat down to the table with appetites whetted by their long ride, and in no degree dulled by the work they had just gone through.

After their repast—their horses having been fed, watered, and rested in the meantime—they prepared to return to Hobart Town.

Mr. Elfinstar requested the surgeon of the prison to send an undertaker out to the Hermitage, as he meant to give the body of poor Hice a decent burial at his own cost; for he could not bear the thought of letting those poor remains be put into a rude pine box and interred in the convicts’ burial ground.

Dr. Briggs promised to do all that was required of him, and the three officers left the Hermitage.

Two days after this the body of poor Hice was taken to the cemetery of St. George, just out of the city limits, and laid in a grave under the shade of a great cedar tree.

And life at the Hermitage relapsed to its calm monotony.

Six weeks had now passed since Hamilton Gower first entered the house of Theobald Elfinstar, and he felt that he must have an explanation with his host and take his leave.

Just one week from the day on which he had first resolved to ask an interview with Mr. Elfinstar, for the purpose of soliciting the hand of his daughter in marriage, and had been prevented by the announcement of the sudden death of Hice and by the events that followed it—he decided to make a second attempt to effect his purpose.

On rising from the table that morning, therefore, he said to his host:

“Mr. Elfinstar, may I speak to you alone for a few minutes?”

"Certainly, sir!" lifting his eyebrows with a look of some surprise, as he waved his hands toward the door and said: "Will you walk into the library?"

When the two gentlemen were seated alone together at the library table and the door was closed, Mr. Elfinstar waited for a few minutes for his guest to open the subject of his business; but as the latter remained silent and somewhat embarrassed, he said:

"Now, Mr. Gower, I am quite at your orders. How can I serve you?"

"My dear sir," began the young man, in a hesitating manner, "I came into your house a perfect stranger, without any letter of introduction——"

"But bringing my child, whom you had rescued from violence. What better letter of introduction could you need or I require than that?"

"Oh, sir, any creature wearing the form of man would have defended a helpless young lady from injury."

"I am not so sure of that. But, at least, I know that you did do so, and laid me under an infinite obligation."

"Let us say no more about that, Mr. Elfinstar. I have been your guest for six weeks, and you have treated me more as a beloved son of the house than as a stranger."

"And you are held even so. Were it consistent with your interests I should implore you to share our isolation, and brighten it by remaining with us forever, a son of the house. But I know, of course, that your interests and your duty must call you elsewhere sooner or later. I hope it may be later, and very much later. I shall mourn the day that takes you from us, Mr. Gower."

"Oh, my dear sir, it rests with your own will to make me in fact what you have called me in affection—a son of the house," said the young gentleman, in a tone of earnestness that caused Mr. Elfinstar to look up in alarm.

"I do not quite understand you, my young friend. You are my son in affection. You might be so really, if, instead of being rich and powerful, as I suspect you to be, you were poor and friendless, as many a worthy young gentleman too often is."

"Sir, I am neither poor nor friendless; but by one of those strange caprices of fortune which distributes her gifts without the slightest regard to merits—passing by the good

to shower her favors upon the good-for-nothing—I am the possessor of wealth and rank; were I not so I should not aspire to be as one of your house. Mr. Elfinstar, I love your daughter.”

“Dear me! dear me! dear me!” sighed the old gentleman, with a look of dismay.

The young gentleman quickly perceived his disturbance and hastened to add: •

“If I prove to you that in wealth, position, and character I am not unworthy of Miss Elfinstar’s hand, may I hope for your approval, sir?”

“Dear me! dear me! dear me!” repeated Mr. Elfinstar, mournfully.

“I trust you do not disapprove my suit, sir,” said Hamilton Gower, anxiously.

“Dear me! dear me! dear me! Have you spoken to my daughter on this subject?” inquired Mr. Elfinstar, in a tone of distress.

“Certainly not, sir! I would not do so without your consent,” gravely replied the lover.

“Then do not speak to her of this. Mr. Gower, Seraph Elfinstar can never marry.”

CHAPTER XXXV

THREE LITTLE WORDS

THE young suitor gazed at the old gentleman with incredulous surprise for a moment, and then said:

“I beg your pardon—I—I cannot have understood you. You surely did not mean to tell me——”

“That my daughter must never marry! Yes, Mr. Gower, that is just what I meant to tell you. Dear me! Ah! dear, dear me!” sighed the old man at the end of his speech.

“But, sir,” impulsively spoke up the young lover, “surely, surely that is a most cruel and unnatural fate to doom her to! Miss Elfinstar has youth, health, beauty. Why should she not marry if the suitor for her hand should prove acceptable to her and worthy of her? I beg your pardon, sir,

if I seem to speak too freely, but my heart is too deeply interested in this question to permit me to keep silence."

"Dear me! Oh, dear me! I am very sorry for this, Mr. Gower. I hope—ah! I hope that Seraph's heart is not equally interested."

"Mr. Elfinstar, I told you that I had not breathed a word of my love or my hopes to Miss Elfinstar, and that I could never have done so without first gaining your consent; but I should not be dealing frankly with you if I did not admit that—I think the young lady has read my heart aright, and—without displeasure," modestly added the lover.

"Which is a delicate way of saying that you are not without the hope that my daughter has discovered and reciprocates your affection," said Mr. Elfinstar.

Hamilton Gower bowed assent, adding:

"We have been too constantly associated together to conceal the state of our feelings from each other."

"Bless my soul! Bless my soul! I would not have had this happen for the world! But I might have known it! I ought to have guarded against it! The fault is mine! It is mine!" moaned the old man, slowly shaking his gray head.

"Mr. Elfinstar," said the lover, after a thoughtful pause, "I see how it is, at length. I did not understand you at first, but now I do. I see the cause of your objection and I acknowledge its reasonableness."

The old gentleman raised his head and fixed his mournful, dark eyes upon the speaker, who went on to say:

"You receive me here, a nameless adventurer without credentials. I might be a ticket-of-leave man, or an ex-convict, for aught you know to the contrary, yet you receive me here because I was so fortunate as to rescue your daughter from danger, and because, besides, I have something of the manner and appearance of a decent bringing up. You admit me, unquestioned, to your house, to your table, to your friendship, but there your complacency ends, and very properly ends. You do not, and you ought not, to admit my suit for your daughter's hand until I have brought you some credentials to prove me worthy of the boon I ask."

"You are mistaken, sir! You are mistaken!" interrupted the old man.

"No! hear me out!" persisted the lover. "It is very kind of you to speak as you do; but I understand you. I can

prove myself in wealth, rank, and, what is more important than all the rest, in personal character, to be not unworthy of the hand of Miss Elfinstar."

"But, my dear Mr. Gower—my dear sir," put in the old gentleman, deprecatingly.

"No, no, listen to me! I am going to tell you a secret which I had intended to keep, as I had good and worthy reasons for keeping it some months longer, but which I now tell you as a matter of duty and necessity. This, then, is my secret: I am really Horace Hawke, sixteenth Earl of Hawkewood in the peerage of England, and I am traveling under an assumed name for private reasons, in which there is not the least cause of reproach. All this, Mr. Elfinstar, I hold myself ready to prove to your own perfect satisfaction. Now, sir, I will not ask you to receive my immediate proposals for your daughter; but I do entreat that you will promise to sanction my suit to Miss Elfinstar as soon as I shall have proved to your satisfaction that I am in reality all that I represent myself to be."

"Mr. Gower, I thank you for giving me a chance to slip in a word 'edgeways' at last," said the old gentleman, with a look of sad sarcasm in his tone. "And now I wish to repeat that you are utterly and entirely mistaken in your premises. I have never doubted your respectability or your worthiness to aspire to the hand of any young lady upon whom you may have set your affections. No, strange as it may seem to you, who set so much value upon 'credentials,' I have never doubted you. On the contrary, from the first I have recognized in you a young gentleman of fair moral and intellectual endowments, and of good rank and culture. I had no objection to you personally even before you announced yourself as the Earl of Hawkewood, and I may say that I have no more, nor no less, now. No, sir, the objection does not lie against you, but against marriage. I repeat, that my daughter must not marry."

"In the name of Heaven, why?" demanded the young lover.

"You must pardon me for declining to enter into particulars, and—you must accept my decision as final."

"But, my dear sir——"

"Say no more upon this subject, I implore you."

"Will you not give me a reason for so strange a determination?"

"Unfortunately I cannot do so."

"But, gracious Heaven, my dear Mr. Elfinstar——"

"My good young friend, our interview is at an end, and this subject must never be renewed," said the old man, rising with an air of dignity.

"Then, sir, I have nothing to do but to bid you good-by, with many thanks for your hospitality. I leave for Hobart Town to-day," replied the young gentleman, starting up in wrath.

"No, no, you must do naught of the sort! Bless my soul, young sir, do you not suppose—do you not see that if it rested with me to do so I would give you my child with delight, knowing that by so doing I should secure all her future happiness? But it does not rest with me to give you my daughter, sir," said Mr. Elfinstar, mournfully.

"If not with you, her father, then who, in the name of Heaven, should it rest with—does it rest with?" demanded the lover.

"Fate," answered the father, solemnly.

The lover gazed on him in silent perplexity.

"Come," said Mr. Elfinstar, with cordial kindness, "do not leave us abruptly, as in anger. Remain with us to the end of the week. You and Seraph are friends who enjoy your mutual friendship! Continue to be friends! But do not seek to be more."

"Mr. Elfinstar, I thank you for your kindness, and I accept it. But I tell you frankly that I must have some explanation with Miss Elfinstar. I am bound in honor, no less than in affection, to do so! Although I have not as yet spoken to her, in so many words, of my love, because I would not have done so without first having sought your consent to the measure, yet—a man who loves as I do cannot always control his looks and tones, and mine have betrayed my feelings and led the young lady to expect from me that explicit proposal which I had hoped for your sanction to make. I have failed to get that sanction, but now I warn you that I must speak to the young lady herself; I must have an understanding with her."

"Very well, my young friend! I would willingly have

spared you both the pain of such an interview; but go on and take the consequences!"

"I shall offer my hand to Miss Elfinstar and beg her to accept my pledge to wait for her and remain faithful to her, until in time we may be so happy as to obtain your consent to our union!"

"There you go again! I do not withhold my consent to your marriage! It is not I who separate you! Not I, but fate! I told you so before! And more, I tell you now, and I feel safe in telling you this—that if you can gain my daughter's consent to your marriage, you shall have mine."

"Shall I? Shall I, indeed?" exclaimed the lover, starting up in delight.

"Undoubtedly you shall! But do not count on her consent. My poor, young friend, you can never get it," sighed the father.

"But I dare to hope that she reciprocates my feelings."

"Very likely, poor child! It was culpable in me to expose her to such a chance! But as I told you that it was not I, but fate who is against your union with my daughter, so now I tell you, also, it will not be she, but fate, who will pronounce your rejection."

"I will not accept the fiat of fate! If Seraph Elfinstar loves me enough to take me, she shall be my wife! When may I speak to her, sir?"

"Now, if you will be so very desperate! You will probably find her in the garden."

Hamilton Gower seized his hat and rushed out. A new inspiration had enlightened his mind. He felt sure that he had now the key of the mystery in the existence of the life convict, Margaret Campbell.

He concluded, from all the circumstances that had come to his knowledge, that this Margaret Campbell was a very near relation of the Elfinstars—perhaps a niece of the old gentleman and a first cousin of the young lady—who could tell? And a morbid delicacy determined both father and daughter never to connect themselves by marriage with any family, lest the latter should suffer the slightest shadow of reproach through such connection.

He would soon discover, through Miss Elfinstar, if this were the case; and if it were, he would know how to combat and overcome all such sickly objections.

With this generous resolution, he hastened out into the garden to find Seraph.

He saw her sitting in one of the arbors, mechanically engaged in an old-fashioned occupation—knitting something that looked like the leg of a man's white woolen sock.

He went in and sat down beside her, and then—being struck with a sudden tremor at the thought of the proposal he was about to make, he plunged at once into a trivial subject.

"You appear to be very much interested in your work, Miss Elfinstar."

"Do I?" she murmured, languidly, as she drew out one of the long needles, laid the article she was making on her lap, and smoothed it out with her slender, white hands. "It is one of a pair of mufties for papa. I knit a dozen pair for him during the summer; he wears them in the winter," she added, as she laid her work aside, and gave her whole attention to her visitor.

"Pray, do not let me interrupt you. Please go on. I can talk while you knit," he said, thinking, poor lad! that he could speak with so much more freedom if her eyes were on her work, instead of on his face.

"But I am tired of it, really. I was just wishing that I had something to read, or some one to talk to," she replied.

"Ah! This Mountain Hermitage is a paradise in beauty and sublimity, in comfort and in luxury; but it is no less a hermitage, notwithstanding all this; and to one so young and lovely as its mistress it must seem dull in its unbroken monotony," he remarked, with more frankness than politeness—for, as I beg you all always to remember, this young gentleman, from the isolated manner in which he had been brought up under the severe eye of his clerical tutor, knew as little of the usages of polite society, with its insincere courtesies, as if he had been reared in the wilds of New Zealand.

"It is very dull. I am sure you must have found it so," answered the young lady, with some little sarcasm.

"I—I have found it dull?" exclaimed the lover, with a look and tone of genuine surprise and perfect sincerity that must have convinced the most incredulous of his truthfulness. "No, indeed, believe me, I have not! Why, Miss Elfinstar, by far the happiest portion of my whole life has

been the period of the last six weeks spent in this Hermitage. So happy have I been that even now, when I feel that it is time, and high time, for me to go away, I seize the slightest pretext to stay on."

"But you are not going away yet a while. You really must not leave us for a long time to come. You said that you had given yourself a two years' leave of absence from your home in England, of which some seven or eight months remain. You said you had been all over these colonies, and had nothing more to see here. Why, then, should you leave us? I am sure that my father expects and desires you to remain with us for months longer. But I beg your pardon, Mr. Gower. I forgot. This place is 'dull in its unbroken monotony,'" said Seraph Elfinstar, with some touch of irony.

"I beg your pardon! You quote the words I used in reference to yourself, and in reply to your own observation. I have assured you—and I beg you to believe me—that I have found this place the most interesting and delightful I ever had the privilege of knowing. It was of you alone I thought—of you, who should be in the world of youth and beauty to which you properly belong—and to which"—the youth hesitated, blushed like a maiden, and then continued in a lower tone—"to which it is my highest ambition and fondest hope to take you."

She was seized with a sudden tremor, and covered her face with her hands.

"Miss Elfinstar," he resumed.

"Oh, don't! don't!" she pleaded, in an agonized tone.

"But, my dear young lady——"

"Ah, hush! You know not what you say! You know not what you do!"

"Miss Elfinstar, I must speak. Your father has given me permission to speak to you on this subject which is so near my heart that my whole life's happiness is involved in it! Your father, I say, has authorized me to speak to you."

"My father—my father has done this? Oh! how could he have done so!" wailed the girl, swaying herself back and forth in great trouble.

"Why should he not? I gave him satisfactory evidence that I was not unworthy to become your——" he was saying; but she interrupted him with an exclamation:

"Oh! it is not that! It is no question of your worthiness at all! Oh! how could my dear father have sent you to me on any such vain, distressing errand? I do not understand it! I do not!"

He sank down beside her and took her hands, that now lay limp upon her lap, leaving her pallid face exposed, and he said, in gentle, pleading tones:

"I love you! I love you! You are the first to whom I have ever spoken these words: 'I love you,' and you will be the last and only one to whom I will ever speak them! They bear my heart's life upon them. Have they no worth at all with you?"

She looked down on him with a wistful, mournful expression in her dark-blue eyes, and repeated in a thrilling, pathetic voice:

"Have those words no value for me? Oh! they have inestimable value! They are precious beyond price! The memory of them will keep me from dying or maddening in the long, lonely life path that stretches out before me across the desert of this world. I thank you for them! I bless you for them!"

"But—you do not love me for them? And love is all I want," he pleaded.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! I love you for them! Ah! I loved you before they were spoken! You know it well! I love you for them! But—that is all that I can do!"

"Miss Elfinstar—dearest Seraph—may I call you so?"

"Ah, yes, you may call me anything you please."

"Then I will call you 'wife,' " he whispered, in a tender, reverential tone.

"Anything but that! Anything but that! You must never, never call me that!" she answered, with bitter energy.

"Does your prohibition apply to all the world as well as to me?" he inquired.

"To all the world! Yes, to all the world!"

"Dearest Seraph, your father more than hinted what your words imply—that some real or fancied obstacle exists to your marriage. Is such the case?"

"Yes, an insurmountable obstacle," she answered, with a sign of profound regret that she did not even attempt to repress.

"Ah! but there can be no obstacle—none—that I will not

surmount in order to win you!" he answered, with enthusiasm; for he was again thinking that the degradation of Margaret Campbell, the convict murderess, and the probably near relation of the Elfinstars, was the obstacle of which she spoke, and which he intended to sweep away with a word.

As she did not reply to his warm declaration, he repeated it with more energy:

"Did you hear me say that there is no possible obstacle that I will not surmount to win you?"

"I heard you say so; you speak wildly, madly," she said, with such a bitter smile that there darted through his brain a new suspicion, which he hastened to express:

"I mean, of course, to except an existing previous marriage, or previous attachment; either of which I should recognize as an 'insurmountable obstacle.' "

"Do you mean on my part?" she inquired, with the same bitter smile.

"I mean on your part, of course. What else should I mean?"

"Truly! But there has been no 'previous marriage or attachment' in my case, nor any possibility of either. I have been set apart from love or from marriage since my childhood."

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, awed by the solemnity of her tone. "You are not a nun, nor an idiot, nor an invalid! You are a young, healthy, and beautiful girl! By what or by whom, then, have you been set apart?"

"By fate," she answered.

"That is what your father told me—not his will, but that of fate divided us! And now I say to you what I said to him—that fate shall not divide us! Since I adore you, since you love me, since your father approves me, since no prior marriage or attachment bars the way, fate shall not have the power to divide us, nor the insolence to attempt it. If you will accept me for your husband, I will make you my wife and bear you off to England in spite of fate!" he exclaimed, with earnest enthusiasm.

Again that bitter smile.

"You are still incredulous. You do not believe me. You cannot trust me. But I tell you, for all that, I defy fate!"

I will conquer fate! If you will consent, I will carry you off to England as my wife!"

"I would give my consent, but that consent would only mock you by its uselessness. You could not marry me and take me home to England, no, not if we all wished it ever so much; not if I consented ever so eagerly, you could not do so if all our lives depended on your doing it! I tell you, fate—inexorable fate—immutable fate, divides us now and must divide us forever!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HIDDEN WOE

"AND now I think I know the name of that Fate!" said the young man, firmly.

Seraph looked up in some alarm.

"Her name is Margaret Campbell! But she shall not divide us!"

The young girl shivered, clasped her hands, dropped her head upon her bosom and moaned.

"There! I knew it! I knew that Margaret Campbell was the obstacle! Your father has immolated himself and his daughter, in sacrifice to this Margaret Campbell! And is she worth it?"

"She is innocent!" moaned the girl.

"You say so, doubtless you think so, and I will not contradict you! But why should your father, and especially you, be sacrificed for her? What is she to you?"

"Do not ask me!"

"I should not but that our mutual love gives me the right! And still I should not use that right were not the question a necessary preliminary to what I am about to urge. Therefore I must press the question—what is this unhappy girl to you? Is she a near relation?"

"She is—a very near—relation to—my father," murmured the girl, with pallid lips, in an expiring tone.

"A near relation to your father, and consequently to you. That is just what I wished to arrive at, my dear and honorable love! For without the certain knowledge of that fact I could not say to you what I say now—that as you are in no degree responsible for the evils and misfortunes in Mar-

garet Campbell's life, you should not feel obliged to suffer for them. You should not permit the facts to hinder you from accepting the hand of the man who is so happy as to love and to be beloved by you."

"Would you"—she murmured, in the faint and gasping utterance of a dying person—"would you really—wish to marry—a woman—connected with—Margaret Campbell?"

"I wish to marry you, be you connected with—no matter whom!"

"If I were—Margaret Campbell's sister?"

He started abruptly before he could control himself; but quickly recovering his composure, he answered, calmly:

"It would not be your fault."

"And you would really marry a sister of Margaret Campbell?"

"If you were that sister, yes! But I should take you far away from these colonies, back to England, where the name of Margaret Campbell is forgotten, and where it never shall be mentioned in your presence, or in mine. And that is what I wish to do, dear Seraph! You are not her sister, I think, for if I remember rightly, Margaret Campbell was an only child, and an orphan; consequently you could not be her sister; but you say she is a very near relation to your father, and of course to you. She may be his niece and your first cousin. I presume she is so?" he concluded, in a slightly interrogatory manner.

Miss Elfinstar made no reply, and he took it for granted that he was right in his conjecture, and he continued:

"If she is so nearly connected with Mr. Elfinstar, and so well beloved by him that he has expatriated himself and has come out to this savage country for the sake of ameliorating her penal servitude by taking her into his family, he can, having her near him, all the better spare you, whom he should not doom to a life of isolation. Once more! I love you! Will you be my wife and return with me to civilization and society?"

"But your family?" she suggested.

"I have no family. I am alone in the world! And now I thank God that I have no one to interfere with me! My nearest relative is a distant cousin, with whom I have an inherited feud! Come, now! place your hand in mine, in token of acceptance!"

And so saying, he held out his in pleading.

"No, no! it cannot, cannot be!" she sighed.

"What cannot be? what?" he demanded, refusing to understand her.

"Our marriage can never be!"

"Then you do not care for me?"

"Oh, I do! I do! Heaven knows how much!" she cried, in a voice of anguish and with a brow of agony, as she wrung and twisted her white and slender fingers. "The thought of giving you up, of parting with you, is more terrible to me than the thought of death—the rending asunder of body and soul!"

"Then why do you give me up? Why do you part with me, only to blight the lives of both of us?"

"Because I cannot help it! Oh, indeed, I cannot help it! I would so gladly if I could!"

"I thought I had set aside the only obstacle to our union—Margaret Campbell! But it seems there is another! What can it be?"

"Mr. Gower, you shall know the whole truth! If it breaks my heart to tell it, you shall know it all the same! It is your right. You have been so frank, so straightforward and confiding in yourself that nothing should be, or shall be, kept from you!"

"I am ready to listen, I am most anxious to hear. There is nothing you can tell me, I am sure, that will not redound to your honor!"

"Let me know, then! and let me judge!"

"Yes, you shall know and judge!"

"Begin, then! I am consumed with impatience to have this new obstacle set up only that I may knock it down! Speak, Seraph! Tell me at once all you have to communicate."

"Ah! not now, or here! I could not tell you the story face to face! Listen, Mr. Gower. Some time ago, in a crisis of my life, when I thought I was going to die, I wrote out all the facts for the satisfaction of the friends that loved me. I have that manuscript by me now. When you are about to leave us I will give it into your hands, and when you shall have read it you will see how impossible it is that I should ever have the happiness of being your wife, or even of returning to my native country. Forgive me for the

cowardice that prevents my telling you face to face, and subjects you to the trouble of reading a manuscript."

"I will restrain my impatience until I get hold of that 'script. Then I will judge for myself. And then I will return and claim your hand. For in giving me this revelation you will only set up an obstacle for me to overthrow!"

"You think so!"

"I know it! Ah, young lady! You are like the beauties in the tales of chivalry. You delight to set your lovers hard tasks by which to prove their valor and their devotion! You have set me such tasks! Very well! I will prove worthy of your trust!" he said, in a tone of gravity entirely free from the slightest apprehension.

But his words won no smile from the pallid lips of Seraph Elfinstar, who, seeming to feel that the whole scene had been too trying to her nervous system, now arose and said:

"Let us return to the house."

He arose and gave her his arm, and she took it without hesitation, for she was pale and faint.

When they reached the house she went immediately to her room, and did not reappear until dinner.

He went into the library to seek Mr. Elfinstar.

He found the old gentleman seated in his armchair, engaged in reading.

"Well, my young friend, you have spoken to my daughter?" inquired the latter, laying down his book.

"Yes, I have spoken to her," replied the suitor, as he sank into a chair.

"And what does Seraph say?"

"Very much what you yourself said, sir—that there is an obstacle. I know not what the nature of that obstacle is; but, since it is not your disapproval, nor her dislike, nor any prior marriage or engagement on her part, I mean to overthrow that obstacle!"

"Ah, my young Don Quixote de la Mancha, there are giants that your lance can never overthrow," sighed the old gentleman.

"We will see. We will see," said Hamilton Gower, confidently.

He would have had an explanation with Mr. Elfinstar in regard to Margaret Campbell, but he remembered the prom-

ise that he had made to Seraph some weeks before, never to mention that name in the presence of her father.

After a few moments, he said:

"I leave for Hobart Town early to-morrow morning; but, with your permission, I shall return to see you in a very few days."

"I shall always be pleased to see you, Mr. Gower. Your visit has been a boon to us," cordially replied his host.

"You are very kind to say so. I know that the six weeks that I have passed under your hospitable roof have been the happiest of my whole life!"

"How pleasant it is to hear you say that! Well, give us as much of your company in the future as you possibly can, my young friend," said the old gentleman, heartily. Then, taking up a pile of papers from the table beside him, he said: "Here are the latest mails from London. Stackpole brought them from town an hour ago. They come by the *Norfolk*, which reached port yesterday. Here is the *London Times*, only five months old, and with all the latest news—to us," he added, with a smile.

Hamilton Gower took up the paper and looked over it. By what seemed the merest accident, his eyes lighted on the column of "Births, Marriages, and Deaths," and the very first item immediately caught his attention:

"At Hawke Hall, Cornwall, on Monday, the second instant, the Countess of Hawkewood of a son and heir."

"Indeed!" mentally ruminated Mr. Hamilton Gower. "Who in the deuce is the Countess of Hawkewood? So Mr. Lewis Manton imagines himself to be an earl, has taken unto himself a countess, and even provided himself with a son and heir! Well, I hope the 'Countess of Hawkewood' and the infant Viscount Hawke are both as well as can be expected. Will there not be something like a disagreeable surprise somewhere about the first of next September! But, *dormez tranquille, madame et messieurs*, several months must elapse before the deluge, and somebody may die or get shipwrecked on his way home to England."

This gave the young man so much food for thought that he scarcely uttered another word during his stay in the library.

Mr. Elfinstar had resumed his book, and seemed quite absorbed over it.

Hamilton Gower, with his eyes fixed upon that paragraph, brooded over it.

"I wonder what woman that dandy found who was idiot enough to marry him? Oh, but he was supposed to be an earl, to be sure! Some woman sold herself for a coronet. Well, I am sorry for the poor woman, who, if she did sell herself for a price, certainly ought to get the price, but who certainly will get nothing but disappointment! And I am sorry for the child, who is innocent! Well, the little fellow may be my heir, after all, for if my Seraph does not marry me—well! I will certainly endeavor to outlive Lewis Manton, if only to keep him from the estate, but I will die a bachelor, and let that baby succeed me."

As he thus ruminated, he ran his eyes carelessly down the column, and, catching sight of the first name in the death list, exclaimed:

"Hello! What is this?"

What, indeed?

Here is the paragraph:

"At Hawke Hall, Cornwall, on Tuesday, the third instant, Volante, Countess of Hawkewood, in the twenty-first year of her age."

"Poor, poor, young lady!" muttered the reader, compassionately. "Volante? Volante? That must have been Lady Volante Belle Isle, the black-haired beauty with whom I waltzed at my birthnight ball, and with whom I was somewhat taken, but not enough to keep me from running away! Well, I should have thought she would have had more spirit than to have married that fellow Manton! But I dare say it was her mother's influence—'Preaching down a daughter's heart,' and so on! And now! what is this? Whew! Death has been busy at Hawke Hall!"

His eyes had fallen on a short paragraph immediately below that which announced the demise of the young Countess of Hawkewood.

It was as follows:

"At Hawke Hall, Cornwall, on Tuesday, the third in-

stant, Lewis Charles Henry, Viscount Hawke, aged one day, infant son and heir of Lewis, seventeenth Earl of Hawkewood."

"Poor baby! Poor young mother! Heavens! what an uncertain thing is human life! But, after all, are they not much happier to have died—the mother in her early youth, the boy in his earliest infancy—than to have lived a long life under the precious rule of the admirable Mr. Manton? I must get back to England before that gentleman's year of mourning has expired, or he has had a chance of beguiling another young lady by means of his false rank and title! Ah! what is rank, wealth, or title, in a world where life is so uncertain? Where few that are born live to grow up? Where fewer, still, live to middle age, and not one in a thousand to old age?"

So deeply moved was the young man by what he had just read, that he did not care to examine the other portions of the paper at all, but he remained buried in grave thought until he was startled by the ringing of the dressing bell.

"Dear me! How time flies!" exclaimed Mr. Elfinstar, laying down his book and taking off his spectacles.

Both gentlemen left the library and repaired to their rooms to dress for dinner, for this ceremony was observed in the Mountain Hermitage as punctiliously as in Belgravia or the Champs de l'Elysee.

At dinner, Hamilton Gower again met Seraph Elfinstar.

Not the slightest allusion was made by either of the three to the interviews of the morning. Only Mr. Elfinstar remarked:

"Our esteemed guest insists on leaving us to-morrow morning! And—unfortunately—as we live in the nineteenth century, I have no power to prevent him! I do not live in a castle, as my remote ancestors did. I cannot detain a guest, or prisoner, as one of them might have done, by thundering forth the order of the old Douglass of Angus:

"Up drawbridge, grooms! What, warder, ho!
Let the portcullis fall!"

for we haven't any castle, and drawbridge, any portcullis, or any warder; no, nor any grooms to speak of, saving a

few stableboys to help our old coachman; so if our guest will go he must go!"

Mr. Hamilton Gower laughed at the quotation and the commentary, saying:

"Though I go away to-morrow, I shall come back so very often that the only order you may have to issue will be to your porter, never admit 'that person.' "

"Meaning you?"

"Meaning me."

"Try us, my young friend! We will stand the test!" said Mr. Elfinstar, with a smile.

Seraph, through all this light "chaffing," which looked less like cheerfulness than an effort to be cheerful, preserved the pensiveness of her mood. She could not rally her spirits at all. Her utmost powers of self-command only insured her calmness.

When dinner was over, the old gentleman proposed a game of whist in the drawing room.

"It will be the very last chance I shall have to enjoy my favorite rubber, for—no one knows how long! I will take 'dummy,' and you two can play together. Even with 'dummy' for a partner, I shall be more than a match for you both," he said, as he took a pack of cards from his table drawer in the library, and led them to the drawing room.

And he was much more than a match for the two absent-minded young folks, who could not confine their attention to the game.

He won the "rub" three times in succession, and got up from the table triumphant and joyful.

Age is often as easily pleased as infancy.

Tea was served in the drawing room, and after it was over they had music. Hamilton and Seraph sang a duet from *Norma*, the young lady playing the accompaniment on the piano.

At length they bade each other good-night, and separated to their several chambers.

Hamilton Gower passed a sleepless night. He was harassed with doubts and fears concerning the revelation that had been promised him by Seraph Elfinstar.

Again and again he said to himself that there could be nothing in that revelation that should forbid his marriage with his beloved.

Again and again he repeated, that, since the father approved him, and the daughter loved him, and there had been no prior marriage nor engagement, nor even attachment, on the part of the young lady, therefore, there could be no possible bar to their union.

Again and again he ridiculed the idea of the existence of the convict girl, Margaret Campbell, and her relationship to the Elfinstars being any objection to his union with Seraph. He had nobody to consult but himself, fortunately, and no one to offend.

Besides—he reminded himself—Margaret Campbell was no very near relation to them, after all. The convict girl was an only child and an orphan, without father or mother, sister or brother; therefore, she could only be the niece of the old gentleman, and the cousin of the young lady, whose family name she did not even bear.

“Nonsense!” he muttered, to his pillow. “The idea of that girl’s fall being an obstacle to a young lady’s marriage! I will wed my Seraph! I will make her the Countess of Hawkewood, and take her home to Hawke Hall, where she shall reign over me and my domain, whose people will adore her for her goodness and her beauty. But, in one respect, I mean to be an inexorable tyrant. I will never permit the name or existence of Margaret Campbell to be uttered or alluded to in my home! If Mr. Elfinstar—who is insane on the subject—chooses to stay out here in Pandemonium for the sake of the convict girl, he must do so, and I hope her society may console him for his self-renunciation. But I shall, after I am married, make it an absolute condition of his writing to my wife, that he never mentions the name, or alludes to the existence, of the convict in any of his letters. My wife must forget that there ever was such a person as Margaret Campbell.”

He raised himself up in bed, shook and beat and turned his heated pillow, and lay down again and tried to sleep; but in vain, for the thought of Margaret Campbell, the *bête noire* of the Elfinstar family, sat like a nightmare upon him.

Sunrise found him wide awake.

He arose to prepare for his ride to Hobart Town. He resolved to start immediately after breakfast, that he might

sooner receive the manuscript from Seraph, and get to some quiet room in the Royal Albert Hotel, where he would shut himself in, open the scroll, and penetrate the mystery of the revelation she had promised.

He dressed himself quickly, and went downstairs and out into the stable yard.

He was so much at home in the Mountain Hermitage that he always felt at liberty to give an order to the servants.

He found old Jonas Stackpole, who was the head groom as well as the coachman, busy among his satellites—some three or four half-grown stableboys.

He directed the old man to have his horse at the house door immediately after the family breakfast, to take him to Hobart Town.

"Not going to leave us, I hope, sir," said the coachman.

"Only for a day or two. I shall come back very often," pleasantly replied the young gentleman.

"I hope so, sir! The place is brighter for your presence."

"Thank you, Stackpole," said Mr. Gower, slipping a sovereign into the hand of the man, who touched his forehead in acknowledgment of the "tip."

"And distribute these among the boys," he added, putting four half crowns to the sovereign.

The coachman saluted again, and the young gentleman walked off, and sauntered through the grounds, now fresh, fragrant, and beautiful in the glory of the morning dew and sunshine.

He remained out until the first breakfast bell rang, when he turned and entered the house, hoping to see Seraph.

None of the family, however, was down as yet.

He went out again, and seated himself on the piazza, leaving the hall door open that he might see Seraph when she should come down the stairs.

He looked out before him over the vast panorama of mountain and valley, lake, river, and forest scenery rolled out below, and glittering in the dewy freshness of the early morning.

He had not very long to beguile his impatience with the view of magnificent scenery.

He soon perceived the approach of Seraph, with some fine sympathy that was independent of sight and hearing, for his face was still toward the outer view, and he neither saw nor heard her, when he felt that she was coming, and started up and went in to greet her.

He met her at the foot of the stairs.

She looked pale and heavy-eyed as if she, too, had passed a sleepless night.

She greeted her lover with a faint, sweet, sad smile, and said:

"Come out onto the piazza; I have something to give you."

She led the way, and he followed her. They sat down together on one of the benches.

She drew a little roll of manuscript from her pocket and handed it to him, saying:

"This will give you the whole truth. I know not how you will receive it; but—I have suffered so fearfully and so long already, and am so inured to pain, that—whatever the end may be—believe me, I can bear it and still live!" she added, with a look of patient resignation that seemed almost to break his heart.

"I tell you what the end will be, beloved! To-morrow morning will find me at your feet again, from which I will never arise until I have your promise to become my wife."

The second bell rang, and the old gentleman came out to join them.

He greeted his guest with cordiality, and said:

"Come, come; coffee does not improve by standing! Give her your arm, Mr. Gower, and let us go to breakfast."

They went in, and sat down to the table, where the young hostess poured out the coffee and the aged host served the ham and muffins, and did all that he could besides to render this parting meal a cheerful one.

Just as they had finished breakfast, old Jonas Stackpole came and announced Mr. Gower's horse as at the door.

"And I must leave you, now, to return, I hope, within a very short time," said the young gentleman, offering his hand to his host.

"The sooner the better, as you know very well, young man," responded the latter, heartily.

Again the departing guest spoke of the kindness of their hospitality, and the happiness he had found under their roof, as he turned from his host to bid good-by to his hostess.

"Until to-morrow," he found an opportunity of whispering to Seraph.

But she sadly shook her head, and so they parted.

His horse was strong and fresh, the morning was clear and cool, the road, after he had descended the mountain and entered upon the highway, was excellent, so that he made such good time as to reach Hobart Town before noon.

He rode immediately up to the Royal Albert, gave his horse to a hostler, and entered the office, where he engaged a suite of apartments consisting of parlor, chamber, and bathroom, on the first floor. He declined the offered refreshments, and hastened up to his apartments, where he dismissed the waiter, locked the door, threw himself into an armchair, and drew Seraph Elfinstar's manuscript from his pocket.

He was in a perfect fever of anxiety to penetrate its mystery!

When he had torn off the neat wrapper that covered it, he found a little pink note directed to himself, tied around the roll with a bit of white ribbon.

Smiling softly to himself at the thought of the dainty fingers that had so deftly done up this parcel, he untied the ribbon, laid aside the manuscript, and retained the note.

Still smiling, he unfolded it and began to read it.

Heaven! What was it that caused him to start and shake that note off his hand as if it had been an asp that had stung him? What was it that curdled his blood in his veins, turned his cheeks to the hue of death, and threw him back in his chair, as near fainting as a strong young man could be?

It was this:

"Before you begin to read my narrative, you must know this in explanation: Mr. Elfinstar is not my father, but my grandfather, and I am Margaret Campbell."

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(PART II, "THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.")

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